

Religious and national identities among young Muslims in Finland

A view from the social constructionist social psychology of religion

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Academic dissertation

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Abstract

In this thesis, I investigate the construction of identities among young Muslims in Finland, with an emphasis on the interplay between religious and national identities. The key research questions are studied in the framework of the social psychology of religion and include: How do young Finnish Muslims negotiate belonging in various religious, national, ethnic, and other identity categories? What kinds of meanings are associated with these categories?

The empirical part of the thesis consists of three sub-studies that are published in three separate articles. In the article “‘Don’t Ever Convert to a Finn’: Young Muslims writing about Finnishness’, together with fellow researcher Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti, I analyse letters that 11- to 16-year-old Muslims have written to an imaginary friend about living in Finland as a young Muslim. For the most part, the letters describe the country in positive terms, as a safe and prosperous society in which Muslims are free to practise their faith. The Finnish culture and people, in turn, are portrayed in a more ambiguous light. On the one hand, Finns are characterised as friendly and respectful but, on the other hand, they sometimes come across as racist in the letters and, in any case, as ‘an Other’ to Muslims. We hypothesise that this sense of Otherness may be due to the ‘civil Lutheranism’ embedded in the Finnish national culture.

For the article ‘Ambassadors of Faith: Young Muslims Negotiating for Agency in the Face of Discursive Government’, I interviewed 14 young Muslims active in civil society organisations. With the help of Foucauldian discourse analysis, I aimed to understand the ways in which young Muslims position themselves in relation to the various discourses that govern the standards of good Muslimness. The young interviewees appeared to be rather skillful at using the discourses to claim agency in both the Muslim community and in the broader society. By emphasising the difference between young Muslims and their parental generation, the interviewees were able to justify the need for Islamic youth organisations distinct from the mosque associations of the older generation.

In the third article, 'Praying for One Umma: Rhetorical Construction of a Global Islamic Community in the Facebook Prayers of Young Finnish Muslims', I employ the tools of rhetorical psychology in order to analyse online prayers. On the basis of the analysis, I argue that the prayers serve a function similar to the 'flagging' of national identity. Through the selective use of rhetorical devices such as metaphor, the prayers portray Muslims worldwide as one unified community that transcends national, ethnic, and even familial boundaries.

Each sub-study utilises a different dataset and a different methodology. Despite this variety of approaches, the studies are bound together by a common ontology and epistemology. In line with social constructionist thinking, I do not regard identities, subjectivities and so forth as entities internal to people, but rather as processes that occur between them. Accordingly, one of the aims of this thesis is to increase the use of social constructionist approaches in the psychology of religion.

The thesis supports the previous findings that young European Muslims are increasingly identifying with one global Muslim community and rejecting the religious traditions that they deem 'ethnic' or 'cultural'. The Finnish national identity is not explicitly rejected, but it is implicitly portrayed as an Other to Islam. By making a sharp distinction between Islam and Finnishness, the informants echo the widespread discourse of Islam as a foreign religion that is alien to Finland and Finnish culture.

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All work and no play would make anybody dull. Hence, I would like to thank everyone at the Honbu Karate Club, Rebel Team / Delariva Finland, and Backstabbers Finland for keeping me sane and providing me with much-needed breaks from overthinking. It is hard to dwell on social constructionism when being choked. OSS!

In the end, it is all about family. I would like to thank my parents for encouraging and believing in me. Mum and Dad, you have always been there for me. I should tell you more often how much that means to me.

As always, this work is dedicated to my wife and son. Thank you for literally everything. You make my world go round.

Teemu Pauha

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1 Introduction

In December 2017, the Republic of Finland celebrated 100 years of independence. In honour of the anniversary, the Muslim youth organisation *Nuorten Muslimien Foorumi* (NMF, Forum for Young Muslims) organised a gala titled 'Our Independence'. The Finnish TV channel *AlfaTV* issued a news report on the gala, interviewing NMF activist Abdel Bettahar. When asked about his organisation, Bettahar stated that the main goal of NMF is to 'construct the kind of Muslims who feel that they are also Finnish, that is, who kind of believe that this is their home and believe that "I, too, have something to give to this society"' (Nuorten Muslimien Foorumi 2017).¹

Bettahar's choice of words is interesting as it suggests that – to paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir (2011, 330) – one is not born, but rather becomes a Finn. Instead of being something inborn, Finnish identity is something that is constructed, something that has to do with belonging (feeling at home) and with agency (feeling that one can contribute). Furthermore, Finnish identity is not automatic because otherwise there would be no need for NMF to declare its construction as their primary goal.

The main argument of this thesis resonates well with the implicit assumptions behind Bettahar's statement: Young Finnish Muslims occupy a social position that is different from both that of their (mostly immigrant) parents and their non-Muslim peers. In their everyday lives, young Muslims encounter the religious traditions of their parents' heritage culture, but also the traditions of their peers, who may have roots all over the world. Many young Muslims have grown up in Finland, and Finland is the only home that they have ever had. Despite this, their religion is widely perceived as foreign (cf. Jaakkola 2009, 62). There are thus many identity categories (Muslim, Finnish, immigrant, cosmopolite, etc.) that young Muslims could claim to belong to, but few that they can take for granted. Navigating among the various identity options is no mean feat (cf. Cesari 2013, 49–69; Oikarinen-Jabai 2017a, 51).

¹ '[...] rakennetaan tavallaan sellaisia muslimeita, jotka kokee olevansa myöskin suomalaisi[a] eli tavallaan uskoo siihen, että tämä on heidän koti, ja uskoo siihen, että "mullakin on annettavaa tälle yhteiskunnalle".'

In the public discussion, young Muslims are often framed as a social problem, and their integration into society is a central concern both in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. A related concern is the violent radicalism manifested by some. This, in turn, has resulted in increasing governance and securitisation of Islam and Muslims in Europe (see, for example, Bayat & Herrera 2010, 4–5; Cesari 2013, 1–20; Field 2011, 159–160; Hamid 2011, 247 & 251–252; Kashyap & Lewis 2013, 2117–2118; Martikainen & Tiilikainen 2013; Mushaben 2008, 508). For instance, in October 2014, the Finnish Ministry of the Interior organised a meeting on cooperation between the authorities and Muslim mothers on preventing young Muslims from travelling to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. According to the Ministry, a central theme of the discussion was the difficult situation faced by young Muslims who feel at home neither in Finland nor in the country of origin of their parents (Ministry of the Interior 2014).

In the many discussions on young Muslims, there is one group of people that is given noticeably little voice: young Muslims themselves. Academic contributions that present young Muslims in their own words have likewise been scarce, even to the extent that ‘the number of works which incorporate the views of young Muslims themselves so as to understand their hopes and fears, struggles and perplexities of growing up in contexts frequently suspicious of Islam and Muslims, can still be counted on one hand’ (Lewis 2010, xii; see also Otterbeck 2013, 115).

In this thesis, my goal is to give young Muslims in Finland a voice, and to study how they position themselves in Finnish society. I investigate how young Muslims define identity and negotiate belonging in religious, national, and other communities. I am particularly interested in how they combine national and religious belonging. What do young Muslims mean when they talk about ‘Finnishness’?

My own academic background is in psychology and the study of religion. In this project, I am working within the framework of the social psychology of religion and, more specifically, within the social constructionist social psychology of religion. As such, my work is concerned with the interpersonal processes of identity construction. I study the ways in which my young informants make sense of their religious tradition and use it in negotiating their religious and national belonging.

Before describing the study in more detail, I will devote Section 2 to a brief outline of the Finnish Muslim community and the status of Islam in Finland. Despite focusing on Islam, I will also discuss the Finnish religious landscape more generally, to the extent that is necessary for understanding the broader context in which my young Muslim informants are situated.

In Section 3, I will describe the state of the art of the related research and introduce the key concepts. Psychological studies on religion have largely concentrated on Christianity and adopted an individual differences approach to the topic (cf. Herriott 2007, 48). Psychological and social psychological studies on Muslims are relatively scarce and tend to focus on measuring their religiosity and its correlates. In order to supplement the otherwise limited research base, I draw on resources from related fields, especially the sociology and anthropology of religion.

The remaining Sections 4 and 5 focus on introducing my own research. The overall research project is divided into three sub-studies, all of which have different datasets and employ different methods. Besides interviews (sub-study 2), I have gathered data from social media networks (sub-study 3) and through writing assignments (sub-study 1). Varying forms of data require varying analytical methods. Accordingly, I have applied the methodological tools of Grounded Theory (sub-study 1), Foucauldian discourse analysis (sub-study 2), and rhetorical psychology (sub-study 3) in the course of the analytical process. Together, the different kinds of data provide rich and multifaceted insights into identity construction among young Muslims in Finland. For the most part, all three sub-studies give rise to similar conclusions. However, there are also some noteworthy contrasts that I wish to highlight. Finally, the concluding sections of my thesis are devoted to a discussion of the results as well as the limitations and future directions of the study.

2 Research context

2.1 Islam in Finland

Finland has had its own Muslim community for a fairly long time. The first Muslims to settle in Finland were Russian soldiers that were stationed there after the annexation of Finland to Russia in 1808. The first permanent Muslim community both in Finland and the rest of the Nordic countries, in turn, was that of the Tatars who started to arrive in the 1870s. In 1923, independent Finland granted Muslims the status of an official religious organisation. After the 1920s, the size and composition of the Finnish Muslim population remained relatively stable. However, the situation began to change in the 1990s, when the number of quota refugees and asylum seekers rose, together with other forms of migration. Due to the lack of official statistics, all current figures regarding Muslims in Finland are very rough estimates. Experts in the field estimate the number of Muslims in Finland to be at least 70,000, over half of whom consist of adolescents under the age of twenty (Pauha 2018, 240–241; Pauha & Martikainen 2014, 218–219).

Apart from the small community of some 600 Tatars, the Finnish Muslim community is thus fairly young, with the majority being either first-generation immigrants or their Finnish-born children. Compared with many other European countries, the Finnish Muslim community is also markedly multiethnic, with no single group having a clear majority. The largest national or ethnic groups are Somalis, Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Bosniaks, Iranians and Kosovo Albanians. It is estimated that approximately 10% of the Muslims in Finland are Shia (Pauha 2018, 240–242; Pauha & Martikainen 2014, 218–219).

The Finnish Muslim population is predominantly concentrated in the capital region and a few major cities, especially Tampere and Turku. In 2017, there were approximately 140 registered Muslim organisations, the largest of which had well over 2,000 members. Islamic religious education is provided in schools, but other public institutions recognise Islam in a more limited manner. The military, prisons, and hospitals, for example, do not systematically provide Muslim chaplaincy. The Tatars have had their own mosques and cemeteries for decades, but otherwise

attempts at purpose-built mosques and Islamic cemeteries have been unsuccessful (Pauha 2018, 240–245).

With regard to the social context, it is also important to mention the spread of Islamophobic attitudes. According to the International Social Survey Programme of 2008, approximately one-half of the Finnish population harbours a negative attitude towards Islam and Muslims. This is a higher percentage of negative attitudes than in any other country in the study. Sociologist of religion Kimmo Ketola (2010, 47–48) has listed three possible factors contributing to this: First, studies show that, in the Finnish media, Islam is most often associated with violence, despotism, and general backwardness. Second, Finns appear to bear general animosity towards publicly visible religious practices. With traditions like *hijab*, fasting, and prayer, for many Finns Islam represents visible religiosity that is generally regarded as suspicious. Third, in Finland, Islam is often perceived as a foreign religion, and Islamophobia is therefore interwoven with more general xenophobia (Ketola 2010, 47–48). Indeed, correlative studies demonstrate that negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslims are strongly associated with nationalist feelings; Islam is perceived negatively because it is considered a threat to the Finnish national culture and its values (Ketola 2016, 84; Pauha & Ketola 2015).

Despite the anti-Muslim attitudes, the number of Muslims in Finland will almost certainly continue to grow. The Pew Research Center (2015, 50) has estimated that the Muslim proportion of the population in Finland will increase from 0.8% in 2010 to 3.4% in 2050. Even with no further migration, the proportion will grow, but more modestly, to approximately 1.4%.

In today's world, communities do not necessarily limit themselves to national borders. As a result, the so-called transnational dimension is important to take into account even when discussing Islam in Finland (cf. Cesari 2013, 129; Sakaranaho 2015a, 2). The informants in my study, for example, visited their parents' countries of origin and connected with their co-believers in other countries via social media. The importance of the Internet with regard to the religiosity of young Muslims cannot be overstated. In his study on the autobiographies of young Muslim activists, Marko Juntunen (2009, 18) remarks that the Internet has taken the role that previously belonged to one's peers with regard to religious socialisation. In view of its interactive

nature, the Internet also contributes to the well-documented decline of traditional authorities among young European Muslims (cf. Cesari 2013, 129; Karlsson Minganti 2008, 13; Levenson, Aldwin & Igarashi 2013, 185).

2.2 The Finnish religious landscape

When discussing Islam in Finland, it is important to make a few remarks regarding the general status of religion in Finnish society. In many respects, Finland is a rather secularised country: Approximately 70 per cent of the Finnish population are still members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, but the number is decreasing rapidly. Less than one-tenth of the population participate in Mass or any other church activity on a monthly basis. Furthermore, only one-third of the population declare a belief in the Christian God, while one-quarter deny believing in any deity (Ketola 2016). More importantly, regional differences are considerable, and church attendance is at its lowest in Helsinki, which is also where Muslims are concentrated. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is losing its hold on young adults in particular; of the 26- to 45-year-olds in Helsinki, less than 50 per cent are Church members (Sohlberg & Ketola 2016, 28–30).

However, straightforward secularisation is a much too simplistic way to describe the Finnish religious landscape. Echoing Grace Davie's (1990) characterisation of the British as 'believing without belonging', Finnish religiosity has often been described as 'believing in belonging' (Niemelä 2015, 172). In other words, despite the low levels of Lutheran practice, the majority of the population are still members of the Lutheran Church, and the Church bears the primary responsibility for arranging rites of passage.² Furthermore, and as argued at length in one of the sub-studies (Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2013), public representations of Finnishness and Lutheranism are in many respects overlapping and intertwined – to the extent, in fact, that we

² In 2015, about 70% of newborns received a Lutheran baptism, nearly half of all marriages were performed by Lutheran clergy, and over 90% of the deceased received a Lutheran burial (Sohlberg & Ketola 2016, 31).

introduced the concept of 'Finnish civil Lutheranism' to characterise the main religious ethos of Finnish society.³

This duly begs the question of whether Finnish society is religious or secular. Depending on how we define the terms, Finnish society may well be both. Concentrating only on Church membership figures, a casual observer could conclude that Finland is patently Christian, and rather homogeneously so. The apparent homogeneity, however, conceals a rich diversity of individual worldviews. A member of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church may be completely uninterested in all things religious and a member only because of being baptised as a child; or she may be active in the revival movements that are part of the Church but relatively independent and idiosyncratic in their theology; or, alternatively, she may identify with selected parts of the Christian tradition and at the same time explore the milieu of alternative spiritualities, practising Buddhist meditation, for example, and shamanic drumming.

Besides the general trends discussed above, it is also worth noting the smaller currents that are easily overlooked in population-level statistics. In addition to the approximately 4,000,000 Lutherans, Finland is also home to a number of religious minority communities.⁴ Furthermore, about a quarter of Finns – 1,400,000 people – do not belong to any religious community (Statistics Finland 2017, 466). Of this group, only one-tenth self-identify as atheist, while approximately 40 per cent consider themselves religious. Conversely, a large proportion of those

³ Despite the well-established status of Finnish civil Lutheranism, more recent studies indicate that the generation born after the early 1980s has a different relationship to Lutheranism and no longer considers it a matter of cultural maintenance, but rather a matter of personal faith and values. Relatedly, this so-called Generation Y has left the Church in relatively large numbers (Niemelä 2015).

⁴ The Finnish Orthodox Church is the second national church and, with over 60,000 members, also the second largest religious community in Finland. When combined, the other Christian churches have a total membership of between 45,000 and 50,000, while Jews number less than 1,200 (Statistics Finland 2017, 466). Estimating the number of adherents to other religions is more difficult because many non-Christian faiths do not traditionally have a congregational structure that is based on individual membership. The majority of Finnish Muslims and Buddhists, for example, are not members of any registered religious community (Martikainen 2013, 9–16). Religion scholar Tuomas Martikainen (2013, 9), however, has suggested that there are approximately 10,000 Buddhists and Hindus in Finland.

Finns who identify as atheists are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Taira 2014, 248 & 252). As discussed above, being a Lutheran is for many Finns not so much a matter of individual beliefs but of cultural maintenance. For this reason, 'a Lutheran atheist' is not necessarily a contradiction in terms.

In summary, compared with many other European countries, the Muslim community in Finland is fairly young and ethnically diverse. The majority of Muslims are adolescents living in the capital region and other major cities. The society surrounding them is predominantly Lutheran, at least nominally. Even though the majority of Finns deny believing in the Christian God, they still regard Lutheranism as one aspect of their national identity. Despite Finnish society being far from religiously homogeneous, the idea of a religiously uniform Lutheran country may be used to maintain a sense of national cohesion. For many Finns, being Lutheran is part of being Finnish, and Islam is therefore seen as something foreign – something that may pose a threat to this cohesion.

In this thesis, I aim to demonstrate that young Muslims are also participants in perpetuating the idea of a religiously homogeneous Finland. By associating Finnishness with Christianity, they construct a national identity from which both they themselves and other religious minorities are excluded.

3 Previous research and central concepts

3.1 Social psychology of religion as a branch of the study of religions

3.1.1 The study of religions as an interdisciplinary field

As has often been noted, the study of religions⁵ is not a unified discipline, but an interdisciplinary field (see, for example, Chryssides & Geaves 2007, 39; Laitila 2006, 10; Wiebe 2010, 131). Instead of having methods and theories of its own, the study of religions borrows liberally from the social sciences and humanities, and applies their approaches to investigating religious people and practices (Laitila 2006, 10).

The study of religions is thus defined by its subject area, and not by a certain theoretical or methodological starting point. Psychologist of religion Jacob A. Belzen (2010, 5), for example, has defined the study of religions⁶ as ‘the conglomerate of all scientific approaches to “religion” (however understood), practiced from the perspective of the different disciplines that might be relevant to investigating any “religious” phenomenon or state of affairs (but ideally pursued from an interdisciplinary perspective); and they are usually situated at a department for the advancement of that specific discipline’. Kimmo Ketola (1998, 24) has defined the field similarly: ‘The study of religions encompasses all research that is conducted with scientific methods and

⁵ In this thesis, I employ the term ‘study of religions’ instead of the alternatives ‘comparative religion’ or ‘religious studies’. The former is a somewhat outdated term from the era in which scholars of religion concentrated on seeking commonalities and differences between different religious traditions (see, for example, Chryssides & Geaves 2007, 11 & 107; Ketola 1998, 26–27). The latter, in turn, is sometimes understood in the sense of research itself being religious, that is, guided by religious convictions (see, for example, Chryssides & Geaves 2007, 7–8; Wiebe 2010, 129; cf. Belzen 2010, 5).

⁶ Belzen (2010, 5) translates the German term ‘Religionswissenschaft’ as ‘sciences of religion’. I, however, feel uneasy with the translation because of the strong association that the word ‘science’ has with natural sciences.

that focuses on a phenomenon which can, according to conventions prevalent in the discipline, be identified as belonging under the label of religion'.⁷

The study of religions is thus an umbrella term – or in Belzen's (2010, 5) words, a 'conglomerate' – that contains several distinct disciplines that focus on religion. There are five main traditional disciplines: the history of religion, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, phenomenology of religion, and psychology of religion (see, for example, Anttonen 2012, 12; Ketola 1998, 27; Laitila 2006; Pentikäinen 1986, 11–12; Suojanen 2000). My own primary framework, the psychology of religion, can likewise be understood as an umbrella term for a range of approaches. Jan M. van der Lans (2002, 24) has defined the psychology of religion as follows:

Psychology of religion wants to explain the phenomena of religion, both individual (belief, experience, practice, religion in the biography) and social (relationship between type of religious orientation on the one hand, and group life, intergroup relations, societal issues on the other), using psychological concepts and theories. Note that there is not one psychology of religion but a diversity of approaches. Most current theoretical approaches in the psychology of religion are inspired by either social psychology or psychoanalysis.

The Finnish tradition of the study of religions is rather unique with its strong emphasis on the study of folklore. The establishment of the field in Finland coincided with the rise of Finnish nationalism and, consequently, much research effort was devoted to ethnographic work among Finno-Ugric peoples. Since the 1970s, the focus has shifted more to modern societies and global religious currents (Anttonen 2012, 48–72).

In contrast to the heavy emphasis on the history of religion that has been typical of other Nordic countries, the Finnish study of religions is more anthropologically and phenomenologically

⁷ 'Uskontotiedettä on kaikki se tieteellisin metodein suoritettu tutkimus, joka kohdistuu ilmiöön, joka voidaan tieteenalalla vallitsevien konventioiden mukaisesti tunnistaa kuuluvaksi uskonnon nimikkeeseen alle.'

oriented (Suojanen 2000, 217). The psychology of religion, in turn, is particularly well represented in Sweden, largely because of the influence of Hjalmar Sundén and his role theory (Belzen 1995, 47–48).⁸ In Finland, Sundén’s legacy, and the psychology of religion more generally, have gained a foothold at the Department of Comparative Religion at Åbo Akademi University (ÅAU) in Turku (Suojanen 2000, 217). Nils G. Holm, a long-serving professor at ÅAU, has published extensively, for example on the psychology of glossolalia and religious experience (see, for example, Holm 1995, 1987, 1982, 1978, 1975). Like Sundén, Holm has been theoretically eclectic, drawing on influences from social to developmental to depth psychology (cf. Korkee 1998, 83–84; Suojanen 2000, 217). In turn, Holm’s successor as professor, Peter Nynäs, has studied topics such as the role of early intersubjective relationships in religiosity and the psychological processes that are involved in the reception of religious communication, such as radio devotionals, or of religious spaces, such as urban chapels (see, for example, Nynäs 2008a, 2008b, 2007).

3.1.2 The psychology of religion in the space between psychology and the study of religions

As a scientific endeavour, the psychology of religion is almost as old as psychology more generally.⁹ Almost all of the major names in early psychology discussed religion and dedicated books to it (see, for example, Freud 1913; James 1902; Wundt 1906). In the 1930s, however, the tide turned and religion practically disappeared from the psychological research literature (Holm 1997, 99; Laitila 2006, 81–83; Loewenthal 2000, 7–9; Richards 2012, 871–872; Spilka 2012, 928–929; Wulff 1997, 185–186). The only exceptions were social and personality psychologists, such as Gordon Allport (see, for example, 1950), who were engaged in the measurement of religious beliefs and attitudes (Richards 2012, 871; Spilka 2012, 929).¹⁰ Apart from their efforts, the

⁸ Sundén’s role theory will be further discussed in 3.4. For a review of role theory and studies applying it, see Lindgren (2014).

⁹ Reviews typically point to the USA at the turn of the 20th century as the birthplace of the scientific psychology of religion (see, for example, Kato 2016, 71; Laitila 2006, 80–83; Richards 2012; Spilka 2012; Suojanen 2000, 92–93).

¹⁰ It has been estimated that between 1950 and 1974, social psychologists conducted approximately 70 per cent of the published research in the psychology of religion (Connolly 1999, 160; see also Laitila, 2006, 94).

psychology of religion was mostly sustained by theologians and religious studies scholars (Holm 1997, 99; Spilka 2012, 929; Wulff 1997, 186).

After several decades of neglect, religion started to make a comeback in psychology¹¹ (Holm 1997, 99; Loewenthal, 2000, 9–11; Richards 2012, 871–872). However, in Europe in particular, the psychology of religion continued to be located mainly in schools of theology, and not in those of psychology or social psychology. As a result, the developments in the latter disciplines have affected the psychology of religion only in a limited manner (Laitila 2006, 80 & 96; Stausberg 2008, 310; Wulff 1991, 31). This, in turn, has led scholars such as David M. Wulff (1991, 31) to call for a closer association between the psychology of religion and other branches of psychology.

Psychological studies on religion have largely concentrated on (especially North American) Christianity and adopted an individual differences approach to the topic (Abu-Raiya 2017, 546; 2013, 681; Herriott 2007, 48; Loewenthal 2007, 9; Widdicombe 2011, 468). Most research efforts have been devoted to designing measures of religiosity and correlating them with measures of personality, attitudes, and well-being (Anderson 2015, 180; Batson, Schoenrade & Ventis 1993, 181; Connolly 1999, 160; Hood 2013, 87; Laitila 2006, 94; Widdicombe 2011, 468).

Like psychology more generally, the psychology of religion is divided into a number of subdisciplines such as the developmental psychology of religion and the neuropsychology of religion. The social psychology of religion is a further subdiscipline that has become increasingly relevant in our time of increasing irreligion and religious conflict. Besides being a part of the psychology of religion, the social psychology of religion also belongs to the more general domain of social psychology (see Figure 1).

¹¹ Loewenthal (2000, 10) has reported that before 1993, an average undergraduate textbook on personality or social psychology contained zero references to religion. Since then, the average number of references has increased to four.

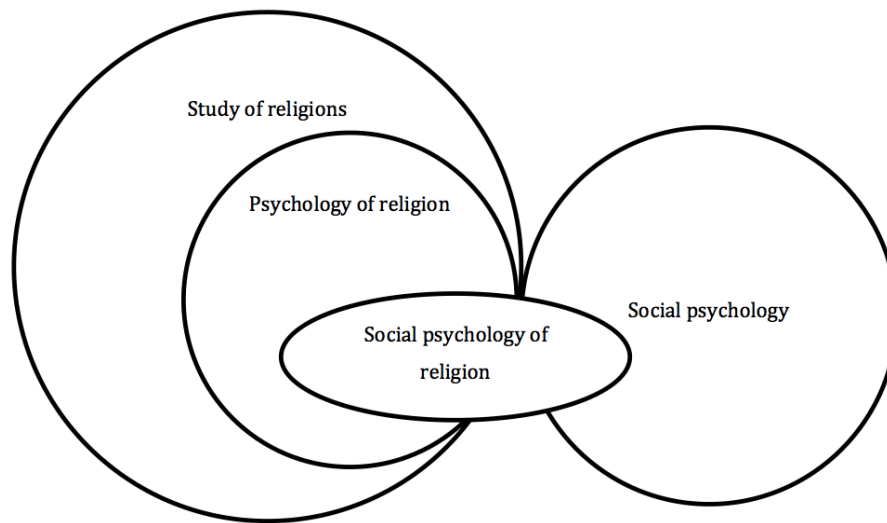


Figure 1. Social psychology of religion and related disciplines

Figure 1 above is rather idealistic because, at least institutionally, the social psychology of religion is not a well-established discipline in its own right. There are currently no journals, study programmes, university chairs, or academic societies dedicated to the social psychological study of religion. Instead, because of the historical developments described at the beginning of this section, the social psychology of religion has been advanced separately in several different academic settings. Institutional boundaries have been lamentably high, and social psychologists and religion scholars have conducted their research largely unaware of each other's work (cf. Kato 2016, 72). However, institutional boundaries do not correspond to fundamental differences in theory and method. As discussed above, any scientific research that concerns religion can, at least in principle, be included under the umbrella of the study of religions.

Up to now, the social psychology of religion has primarily adhered to the cognitivist tradition of social psychology.¹² The most central topic in this line of research (and in the social psychology of

¹² Louise Phillips and Marianne W. Jørgensen (2002, 96 & 102) have referred to the prevailing paradigm of social psychology as 'cognitivist'. In the cognitivist paradigm, attitudes and behaviour are explained in terms of private mental states and universal cognitive processes, such as thinking and perceiving. The focus is thus on the

religion in general) concerns the religious orientations originally defined by Allport and Ross (1967) (Nielsen, Hatton & Donahue 2013, 312–315). Acculturation research focusing on religious identities and the integration of Muslim immigrants often belongs to the cognitivist paradigm, too. The social constructionist turn, in contrast, has had little influence on the social psychology of religion, despite deeply affecting recent developments in social psychology (cf. van der Lans 2002, 26–27).¹³

In the interdisciplinary spirit of the study of religions, I draw liberally on the many disciplines that are relevant for understanding the complex lives of young European Muslims. My methodology and conception of identity are rooted in social constructionist social psychology. Sociological works on the religious landscape in Europe have been essential for outlining the context in which young Muslims are living. Furthermore, while I have not conducted a full-fledged ethnography, the traditional focus of Finnish religion scholars on anthropological fieldwork has motivated me to visit Muslim youth groups, participate in their activities, and otherwise personally experience the aforementioned context.

One final note is in order before proceeding to the research state of the art. In recent decades and due to the globalisation of psychology, non-Western authors have increasingly attempted to develop psychologies that incorporate their cultural (and often religious) heritage. The resulting psychologies (for example, ‘Islamic psychology’) have an uneasy relationship with mainstream psychology (Richards 2012, 877). ‘Islamic psychology’ as a normative endeavour is conducted with a personal religious commitment to Islam. Islamic religiosity is not necessarily the topic of study here, but rather its starting point; research in Islamic psychology most often focuses on mental health and counselling, but it is guided by Islamic morality and grounded in Islamic religious sources (see, for example, Ashy 1999; Kaplick & Skinner 2017; Şahin 2013; Skinner 2018, 2010). In contrast to Islamic psychology, the psychology of religion – including that of Islam – strives to be non-normative and to refrain from making religious truth claims. A

intrapyschic world of an individual, for it is where psychological phenomena are thought to exist. The social constructionist paradigm, discussed in Section 3.4, has been developed as an alternative to cognitivism.

¹³ For a review of the social psychology of religion, see Nielsen, Hatton & Donahue 2013.

psychologist of religion seeks to understand the role of religion in the lives of his or her informants, while at the same time remaining neutral with regard to its truth value (Hood, Hill & Spilka 2009, 3–5).¹⁴

Somewhat pointedly, one could argue that the main difference between the two psychologies is in their preferred direction of analysis: Islamic psychology uses Islamic theories and concepts to analyse the human mind and behaviour, whereas the psychology of religion analyses Muslim (or other) religiosity with reference to general theories of mental functioning. Following my epistemological stance described in Section 3.4.1, I see value in dialogue between indigenous Islamic psychologies and more mainstream approaches. However, different approaches may have different epistemologies and ontologies that need to be carefully clarified.

3.2 Research state of the art

3.2.1 Acculturation and social psychology of European Islam

With regard to European immigrant Muslims, social psychology-oriented acculturation research has largely investigated their integration patterns, focusing specifically on the relationship between an immigrant's identification with their ethnic heritage culture and identification with the national majority of the host society. Typically, the two identities are regarded either as mutually exclusive or as independent of each other: According to unidirectional models, the process of acculturation involves abandoning the values, attitudes, and customs of the heritage culture in favour of those of the surrounding mainstream culture. In contrast to these models, bidirectional acculturation models conceive of heritage culture maintenance and mainstream culture adoption as relatively independent. Thus, according to bidirectional models, it is possible to endorse both heritage and the mainstream culture to a large extent (see, for example, Ryder, Alden & Paulhus 2000).

¹⁴ See Tapper (1995) for a related discussion on 'Islamic anthropology' and 'anthropology of Islam'.

According to this line of research, religiosity and the religious identity of first- and second-generation immigrants correlates positively with their ethnic identity and attachment to the culture of their country of origin. Conversely, religiosity and religious identity also correlate negatively with their identification and attachment to the host culture (Verkuyten & Yildiz 2007; for a review, see Saroglou & Cohen 2013, 342–343). Moreover, research has attested to the central role of perceived discrimination in shaping these identification patterns. In a study on Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands, for example, Maykel Verkuyten and Ali Aslan Yildiz (2007) found that perceptions of discrimination strengthen the religious identification among the Muslim minority, which in turn leads to a decrease in national identification.

Researchers have also been interested in the level of religiosity among young Muslims in Europe. Investigating the second generation of Turkish Muslims in four European capitals, Fenella Fleischmann and Karen Phalet (2012) found that the degree of religious identification and practice among them is high. Furthermore, religious identification and practice were strongly associated with childhood religious socialisation, which hints at the success of the immigrant community in maintaining its religious traditions. Contrary to the secularisation hypothesis, the level of religiosity was not related to structural integration into society. An exception to this was Germany, where Islam is accommodated by the state to a lesser degree than in the other countries that were studied.

The central role of childhood religious socialisation was further documented by Derya Güngör, Fenella Fleischmann and Karen Phalet (2011) in their study on second-generation Turkish and Moroccan Muslims in Belgium. The researchers demonstrated that the many dimensions of religiosity were related to Quran lessons and parental mosque visits earlier in life. For the most part, the relationship was mediated by the emphasis placed on cultural maintenance; childhood religious socialisation appeared to increase commitment to maintaining the heritage culture, which in turn increased religiosity. As a result, the authors concluded that ‘the religious life of the second generation is part of a continued orientation toward the heritage culture in acculturating families and communities’ (Güngör et al. 2011, 1356).

In contrast to the studies referred to above, the study by Mieke Maliepaard, Mérove Gijsberts and Marcel Lubbers (2012) was longitudinal, charting mosque attendance among Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch Muslims between 1998 and 2006. The study concluded that the previous secularising trend among Dutch Muslims came to an end in 2004. With regard to those born in the Netherlands, the trend was even reversed, and the second generation seemed to be witnessing 'a revival of religious attendance' (Maliepaard et al. 2012, 359).

In a further study, Derya Güngör, Marc H. Bornstein and Karen Phalet (2012) compared Turkish Muslim adolescents in Belgium to both Muslim agemates in Turkey and non-Muslim national minority young people in Belgium. Of the three groups, the Turks in Belgium were the most religious. Their religiosity was also strongly associated with the maintenance of the Turkish culture and commitment to the Turkish identity.

It has been suggested that the alleged increase in religiosity among young Muslims in Europe is a reaction to their marginalisation in society (see, for example, Güngör, Bornstein & Phalet 2012, 372; Maliepaard, Gijsberts & Lubbers 2012, 365–366). Evidence concerning this so-called reactive religiosity hypothesis has been conflicted, however, as some studies support it (Fleischmann, Phalet & Klein 2011), whereas others do not (Fleischmann & Phalet 2012).

The alleged increase in Muslim religiosity has also been called into question. Ridhi Kashyap and Valerie A. Lewis (2013), for example, have analysed survey data and concluded that, despite Muslims being on average more religious than Christians, the generational patterns in religiosity are similar between the two faiths; among both Christians and Muslims, the older generation are more likely than the young to engage in religious practices or espouse a belief in God. At the same time, however, young Muslims differed from both older Muslims and their Christian peers in that religion was exceptionally strongly linked to their sense of self and their personal decisions (Kashyap & Lewis 2013).

Fenella Fleischmann, Karen Phalet and Olivier Klein (2011) have studied how the level of perceived discrimination relates to the politicisation of the second generation of Turkish and Moroccan Muslims in Europe. Not surprisingly, it was found that the strength of identification as

a Muslim was associated with both support for political Islam and the willingness to participate in political action to defend Islamic values. Perceived personal discrimination, in contrast, had a different relation to the two variables, being negatively associated with support for political Islam and at the same time positively associated with political activism.

Previous studies have demonstrated the profound context dependency of Muslim religiosity and its associations with other psychological and demographic variables. Similar causes may have very different effects in different contexts. It has been shown, for example, that Muslim religiosity may hinder social integration, especially educational attainment and interethnic relations, in contexts that are markedly unsympathetic to Islam. In more supportive contexts, in contrast, the levels of Muslim religiosity and social integration appear to be unrelated (Güngör et al. 2013, 211).

With regard to qualitative studies, the works of Nick Hopkins and colleagues are particularly noteworthy. The majority of their studies concentrate on the experiences and interactions of British Muslims with the non-Muslim majority. Their research topics include the ways in which Muslims cope with airport surveillance (Blackwood, Hopkins & Reicher 2015), the strategic use of Muslim identity constructions for political purposes (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins 2004, 2002), and theories that Muslims themselves have about Islamophobia (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins 2006). Several studies concern the presentation of a Muslim identity in the public space, for example the use of a headscarf (Hopkins & Greenwood 2013), ways of identifying as British while maintaining religious distinctiveness (Hopkins 2011a), and Muslim experiences of acting as representatives of their religion to outsiders (Hopkins & Blackwood 2011; Hopkins, Greenwood & Birchall 2007).

In summary, the available studies in acculturation and social psychology suggest that the average level of religiosity among young European Muslims is high, which is at least in part due to successful religious socialisation in childhood. To date, psychological and social psychological research on Muslims in Europe has been predominantly quantitative and conducted in Belgium or the Netherlands. Furthermore, the majority of studies have concentrated on a specific ethnic community, most often Moroccan or Turkish, instead of studying Muslims at large.

3.2.2 Sociologically oriented research on young Muslims in Europe

In contrast to social psychology-oriented acculturation research, anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists have been more active in studying Islam and Muslims in the West. These studies are too numerous to be listed here, but there are several useful reviews available (see, for example, Duderija 2007; Sakaranaho & Pauha 2016; Voas & Fleischmann 2012). I will summarise the most relevant findings of these reviews below.

With regard to *young* Muslims in Europe in particular, the studies are less numerous. Islamologist Garbi Schmidt (2004) has studied young Muslims in Denmark, Sweden, and the United States, analysing the aesthetic, ethical, and other aspects of young Muslim identity. Schmidt's (ibid.) informants emphasised their religious autonomy in relation to their parents and religious scholars, drawing a clear distinction between their own pure and progressive Islam and their parents' archaic and stagnated religion.

Similar results have been obtained in other studies. Like Schmidt's (2004) informants, the young British Pakistanis studied by sociologist Jessica Jacobson (1997) distinguished sharply between ethnicity and religion, considering the latter as the more important source of identity. Sociologist June Edmunds (2010), in turn, has demonstrated a generation gap between British Muslim university students and their parents. According to Edmunds (2010, 215), young Muslims are 'less "home-centred" (i.e. transnational) than their parents' generation and more global in political orientation'. They are active in British political institutions but their concerns extend to the whole world.

A significant part of the research has adopted a gender perspective, most often focusing on Muslim women. Sports scholar Tess Kay (2006), for example, has studied young British Muslim women and documented the extensive influence of their parents on their involvement in a sports programme and over their lives more generally. Ethnologist Pia Karlsson Minganti (2012, 2008) has studied Swedish Muslim women and their role in a major Muslim youth organisation. According to Karlsson Minganti, youth organisations provide young Muslim women with the necessary religious resources to interpret Islamic tradition in a way that increases their own

agency and that of Muslim women in general. Cultural geographer Claire Dwyer (2000, 1999a, 1999b), in turn, has published several studies on the ways in which young British Muslim women negotiate their identities. I share Dwyer's social-constructionist view of identity, emphasising its hybridity, contextuality, fluidity, and intersectionality.

As mentioned above in Section 1, young European Muslims are often framed as a social problem and as being at risk of radicalisation. Perhaps because of this discourse, many of the studies on them concentrate on extremism. On the basis of her fieldwork with British Muslim youth, sociologist Orla Lynch (2013, 257) has challenged the post-9/11 view of them as potential terrorists and instead emphasised that for her informants, 'an increase in religiosity or in the use of religious symbols does not equate with a rejection of notions of Britishness, but represents an increased security in one's identity and the ability to successfully incorporate multiple elements of one's self into their expressed or developed identity'. Islamic studies scholar Sadek Hamid (2011) has likewise called into question the view of young Muslims as prone to extremism and has emphasised instead the diversity of their attitudes towards faith. By charting the variety of Muslim youth organisations in Britain, Hamid (2011) argues that radical Jihadism is just one of many religious options that range from scholastic traditionalism to modern Sufism.

Also focusing on identity negotiations taking place in the context of Islamic radicalisation in Britain, sociologist Lucy Michael (2011) has studied young British Pakistanis and argued that, for them, Islam provides a vocabulary for both identifying and distancing themselves from various others. Sociologist Daniel Nilsson DeHanas (2013), in turn, has concentrated on British Bengali young adults and characterised their religiosity as 'elastic orthodoxy'. The young Muslims studied by DeHanas accepted certain boundaries of doctrinal orthodoxy, but worked tactically within these boundaries to gain freedom from the demands of parents and the state.

An unequivocal majority of research on European Muslim youth has been conducted with those who are active in Islamic organisations (Otterbeck 2013, 115). The works of religion scholar Jonas Otterbeck (see, for example, 2015, 2013, 2011) provide an important counterbalance to this prevailing tendency. Otterbeck has conducted research with the non-organised Muslim youth in Malmö and Copenhagen. On the basis of his findings, Otterbeck emphasises the individual

complexity and adaptability of religiosity: Young Muslims may wear religious clothing or abstain from non-halal food in certain contexts but not in others. Their practice of religion is often highly privatised – in part because ‘young women often feel, and rightly so, shut out of the mosques, and the young men tend to be alienated by the first-generation migrants’ nostalgia as they try to recreate the authenticity of Islam through aesthetics, language and social orders drawn from past experiences’ (Otterbeck 2013, 125 & 131; 2011, 1175 & 1178).

Studies by sociologists and other social scientists thus stress the religious difference between migrant Muslims and their European-born children. The young participants in these studies pursue religious autonomy by challenging the Islamicness of their parental traditions. This, in turn, marks an interesting contrast with the social psychological studies summarised in Section 3.2.1. I will discuss this contrast and its possible reasons further in Section 3.3.3.

3.2.3 Research on Finnish Muslims

Together with Tuula Sakaranaho, I have authored a recent review of Finnish research on Islam and Muslims (Sakaranaho & Pauha 2016; see also Martikainen 2013, 11–12). Central research topics have included mosques and Islamic associations, religious freedom (Sakaranaho 2006), and the teaching of Islam in schools (Lehtinen 2007; Sakaranaho 2008; Sakaranaho & Martikainen 2015). Considerable research efforts have been devoted to the relationships between Islamic and state actors (Martikainen 2007; Martikainen & Tiilikainen 2013; Sakaranaho 2015b). Besides state governance of Islam, the coverage of Islam in the media has been discussed in a number of publications. A common thread in these studies is that media representations often associate Islam with violence, the oppression of women, opposition to democracy, and general backwardness (Creutz-Kämppi 2008; Keskinen 2013; Maasilta, Rahkonen & Raittila 2008; Männistö 1999; Raittila & Maasilta 2008; Taira 2008). The everyday life of Somali girls, women, and families has also been extensively studied (Al-Sharmani 2015; Isotalo 2015; Niemelä 2006, 2003; Tiilikainen 2003; Virtanen & Vilkama 2008).

The majority of research on Muslims in Finland has been published in Finnish. To date, the only monographs published in English are by Tuula Sakaranaho (2006) and Tuomas Martikainen

(2013). Both works are sociological in orientation, with Martikainen (2013) providing a general overview of immigrant religions in contemporary Finland, and Sakaranaho (2006) contrasting Finnish and Irish models of religious freedom, Islamic education, and the establishment of Muslim communities.

Psychological and social psychological studies involving Finnish Muslims are scarce. Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti, Karmela Liebkind and Riku Perhoniemi (2006) studied the effect of perceived discrimination on the psychological stress symptoms and general health status of immigrants. Their sample included respondents with Albanian, Somali, and Arab backgrounds, but religion is not discussed in the study. Sirkku Varjonen, Emma Nortio, Tuuli Anna Mähönen, and Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti, in turn, studied how Finnish majority members and Estonian-, Russian-, and Somali-speaking immigrants discuss cultural citizenship and multiculturalism. The non-Muslim participants in these studies construed Islam as problematic to the extent that it was seen as forcing its norms on the non-Muslim population (Nortio et al. 2016, 631–632; Varjonen et al. 2017, 7–8).

In comparison to research on the adult Muslim population and Islam more generally, young Muslims have been under-researched in Finland to date. Moreover, studies on young Muslims have, by and large, been Somali-focused and conducted by anthropologists. I am aware of three doctoral dissertations that focus on young Muslims in Finland: Anne Alitolppa-Niitamo (2004) studied the adjustment of young Somalis to Finnish schools. Petri Hautaniemi's dissertation (2004) concerns the identity construction of Somali boys. A more recent work by Anu Isotalo (2015), in turn, focuses on Somali girls and the meanings that they attribute to good and bad reputations.

The Migrant Health and Wellbeing Study by the National Institute for Health and Welfare has produced a report on the health and well-being of adolescents with a Somali or Kurdish background, the majority of whom were Muslims. The report investigates migrant youth experiences of integration, health problems, and bullying, but religion is practically ignored (Wikström, Haikkola & Laatikainen 2014).

The dissertation by Inkeri Rissanen (2014b) concentrates on religious education, but Rissanen also pays attention to the ways in which Muslim students negotiate religious and cultural differences. Also worth noting is the special issue of the youth studies journal *Nuorisotutkimus* on young Muslims (Martikainen 2009). At the time of writing, there is an ongoing research project entitled *Young Muslims and Resilience – A Participatory Study* in which young Muslims create audiovisual products for exploring their identities and positionings (Oikarinen-Jabai 2017a, 2017b).

In summary, the studies on Islam in contemporary Finland are predominantly sociological, concentrating on the status of religion in society. Thus, instead of Muslims per se, the focus has been on the state and its religion policies. Besides these top-down studies, some research has adopted a more bottom-up approach and studied the members of Muslim communities, especially girls and women of Somali origin. Such research has often been ethnographic in orientation. Psychological and social psychological studies on Finnish Muslims, in turn, have been few and far between, and have largely ignored religion.

This thesis makes a psychological contribution to the Finnish research on Islam. Instead of focusing on a specific ethnic group, I study multiethnic religious communities, which, as per the research summarised in Section 3.2.2, may be the most important religious reference groups for young Muslims. I also complement the extensive research on the media coverage of Islam by analysing media content produced by Finnish Muslims themselves (Pauha 2017).

3.3 Identity and subjectivity

Within developmental psychology, there is a general consensus that identity formation is a central task of adolescence. In Finnish society, school-aged children may already play a variety of different roles, including those of daughter/son, sister/brother, student, or friend. However, it is not until adolescence that youngsters typically begin to seek unity among their various roles and self-conceptions. Finding unity amid diversity is often challenging, and especially so in contemporary society in which a number of identity options and lifestyle choices are on offer. For

some young people, the variety of options is confusing, which may leave their various roles disconnected from each other (Gollnick 2008, 92). In this thesis, I study the meanings that young Muslims assign to various group memberships. The focus is duly on how the informants relate to different ethnic, national, religious, and other communities in their lives.

Psychology and social psychology have no established consensus on which terminology to use when denoting a person as an individual in a community. Depending on the context and the author, the term of choice may be I, ego, self, subjectivity, identity, self-concept, self-identity, and so forth. Sometimes, these terms are used as synonyms; at other times, distinctions are made between them (cf. Elliott 2011, xiv).

During my research, I have used two different concepts to refer to approximately the same thing. 'Identity' is a central concept in two of the articles that comprise my thesis. In the third, I use the term 'subjectivity' instead. By using different terms, I wish to emphasise different aspects of selfhood. Stemming from Foucauldian discourse analysis, 'subjectivity' is useful when discussing the political and agentic aspects of the self. The starting point of Foucauldian terminology is the embeddedness of selfhood in power and discourse. However, from a Foucauldian perspective, power is not only repressive, but also productive and creative. Accordingly, the Foucauldian framework provides tools for conceptualising the ways in which power, on the one hand, limits the available positionings, and arises from the positionings adopted, on the other (cf. Kendall 2011; Weedon, 2004, 17–19). 'Identity', in contrast, emphasises the representational aspects of selfhood; here, representation refers both to being a representative of a group and resembling or depicting something. When a person identifies with a group or idea, the group or idea is a part of how he or she sees him- or herself.

Chris Weedon (2004, 20) has clarified the relationship between the concepts as follows: 'Identity is perhaps best understood as a limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one *is*. One of the key ideological roles of identity is to curtail the plural possibilities of subjectivity inherent in the wider discursive field and to give

individuals a singular sense of who they are and where they belong'.¹⁵ Identity is thus about defining oneself – or being defined – through certain subject positions. One exercises one's subjectivity to occupy some of the positions that are on offer and consequently becomes identified with them.

Margaret Wetherell's (2008, 75) explanation is rather similar:

'Identity', thus, allows the researcher to investigate what groups and their relations make possible for subjects. 'Subjectivity' tells the story of how a specific self lives those available cultural slots, actively realizes them, takes responsibility and owns them as an agent, turning social category memberships and social roles into ethical, emotional and narrated choices.

Hence, in the usage adopted here, the terms 'identity' and 'subjectivity' direct attention to different aspects of the same process, in this case how young Muslims define and negotiate belonging in religious, national, and other communities. The difference between the two terms is therefore a matter of emphasis, and not a distinction as such. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I use the term 'identity' in the sections that follow.

3.3.1 Personal and social identities

Within identity research, it is a common practice to make a distinction between personal identity and social identities. According to Swann et al. (2012), personal identity consists of those features which the individual experiences as uniquely his or her own – features that distinguish him or her from every other person. Social identity, in turn, is about a sense of belonging and being part of a group (see also Howard 2000, 369). An individual's experience of belonging to a particular gender, nation, age group, ethnic group, or religious community are all examples of

¹⁵ Italics in the original.

their various social identities (Tajfel 1979). A social identity of specific importance here is, of course, that of religious identity.

It is worth noting, however, that in certain situations the conceptual boundaries between personal identity and social identities may be blurred. This is, for example, the idea behind Swann et al.'s (2012) notion of identity fusion. Identity fusion occurs when a person experiences such a powerful union with a group that he or she may perceive him- or herself through the group membership, or vice versa. This, in turn, may promote self-sacrificing altruism for the group and extreme closeness to its members.

Such a powerful union was observed, for example, in Maykel Verkuyten's (2007, 347) study on Turkish-Dutch Muslims. According to Verkuyten, 'for half of the sample their Muslim identity was an integral or inextricable part of how they saw themselves'. In fact, Muslim identity appeared to operate more like a categorical than a continuous variable; every second respondent in the study received the maximum score on a seven-point identity scale, and the data appeared to divide into 'high' and 'total' Muslim identifiers.

The classic theory of social identity dynamics is the Social Identity Theory promulgated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner. According to the theory, group membership and the related social identity help individuals to maintain a positive self-conception. This is achieved through the positive distinctiveness of one's own ingroup. In other words, the ingroup is represented as different from various outgroups, and this difference is valued positively (Howard 2000, 369).

One of the strengths of Islam may lie in its ability to provide the distinctiveness necessary for maintaining a strong social identity. Although she does not refer to Social Identity Theory directly, Jessica Jacobson (1997, 253) proposes distinctiveness as a reason for young Muslims prioritising religious identity over ethnicity: 'the social boundaries defining the young people's religious identities have a clarity and pervasiveness that protects and enhances the minority religion, whereas the boundaries delineating their ethnic identities are far less clear-cut, reflecting and contributing to a decline in the distinctiveness of the minority community'. According to Jacobson (1997, 248–253), the distinctiveness provided by Islam is based on its

fundamental religious teachings. The informants in Jacobson's (1997, 248–253) study understood Islam as a complete way of life that regulates all aspects of one's everyday behaviour. Believers are expected to adhere to certain norms (for example with regard to dress and diet) that set them apart from non-Muslims (Jacobson 1997, 248–253).¹⁶

3.3.2 Religious identity and other social identities

Within Social Identity Theory, at least the implicit understanding has often been that different social identities are functionally similar, providing individuals with self-esteem. The question to raise, therefore, is whether there is anything specifically religious about religious identity. To what extent is being a Muslim – or a member of any religion – functionally similar to being a member of a national or ethnic group? (cf. Anderson 2015, 180).¹⁷

As Fontana (2003, 71) remarks, 'although the outer approach to the psychology of religion may see little real difference between the behavior of [religious devotees] and that of camp followers everywhere, the inner approach may reveal that in at least some cases the motivation is quite different'. Peter Berger (1974) has criticised functional definitions of religion on somewhat similar grounds. According to Berger (1974, 125), functional definitions (definitions that emphasise the psychological or social uses of religion) 'have come to serve an ideological use – as a quasiscientific legitimation of the avoidance of transcendence'. As a result, such definitions are at risk of losing sight of what, for many, is the very core of religion. To remedy this, Berger (*ibid.*), like Fontana (2003, 71), calls for 'an understanding of religion "from within"'.

¹⁶ Of course, as Jonas Otterbeck (see, for example, 2013, 119) has demonstrated, a belief in the norms does not necessarily lead to practising them. It is quite possible to believe in the superiority of a certain lifestyle and still live differently.

¹⁷ The question can be reversed by asking whether other group memberships are similar to religion. Religion scholars Veikko Anttonen (2012, 146) and Risto Pulkkinen (2012, 149), for example, have discussed whether Finnishness is a religion. Anttonen (2012, 146) himself answers the question in the affirmative, arguing that from the perspective of the study of religions, nationalism is one form of religious thought. Like religions, nationalisms involve myths and rituals that maintain the sanctity of communal boundaries (Anttonen 2012, 147 & 150; Pulkkinen 2012, 153).

In line with social constructionist thinking, I am hesitant to essentialise religion by assuming it has a core. Nevertheless, I consider that many interesting aspects of religiosity are obscured if religion is considered *a priori* as one form of group behaviour among others. In this regard, a valuable line of inquiry is to study the social construction of the category of 'religion' (see, for example, Taira 2013, 2010). Instead of assigning a top-down definition to religion, researchers working in this line have adopted a more bottom-up approach, and have analysed how the term is used and what kind of meanings are attributed to it.

Another, somewhat related, question is whether the identities constructed within different religions are similar enough to be grouped under a common label, as religious identities. To what extent is religious identity universal among different religious traditions and to what extent are, for example, Christian and Muslim identities unique?¹⁸

Despite the absence of studies on the universalities in religious identities, there is some evidence that the different religions share similar psychological components. For example, such major psychological dimensions of religion as extrinsic-intrinsic have been identified among several religious traditions, including Islam. The mystical dimension and the distinction between organised religion and individual spirituality are other examples of psychological constructs that have validity across religious lines. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that high religiosity predicts similar values and personality characteristics in different religious traditions (Saroglou & Cohen 2013, 334). In a study that compared native Belgians to both Muslim and non-Muslim immigrants in Belgium, Vassilis Saroglou and Philippe Galand (2004) discovered that, among all three groups, there is a similar relationship between religion and other identities. Being more religious is, for example, associated with having a transnational identity, that is, defining oneself as 'a citizen of the world'.

A further conceptual difficulty arises from the sometimes fuzzy boundaries between religious identity and other social identities, particularly national and ethnic ones. At times, religious and ethnic identities overlap, even to the extent of being virtually identical. The so-called world

¹⁸ See also the discussion on the World Religions Paradigm (WRP) in Section 5.2.

religions have sought to cross ethnic boundaries, but even within them, there are ethnically demarcated sects, such as the Armenian and other Oriental orthodox churches within Christianity. Despite this, ethnic and religious identities also have significant divergences that warrant an analytical distinction between them (Smith 1991, 6–8). For example, as will be discussed further in the following section, at least some young European Muslims actively emphasise the boundary between religion and ethnicity, and seek what they consider to be ‘true Islam’ freed from cultural and ethnic baggage.

It may also be that the relationship between religion and ethnicity is constructed differently by different groups. In contrast to the young Muslims who strongly differentiate between religion and ethnicity, the European mainstream has a certain tendency to ethnicise Islam and to treat Muslims more as an ethnic than a religious category. Every person with a Muslim background is identified as a representative of a common Muslim culture regardless of the country of origin or level of religiosity. The common Muslimness is distinguished from and considered to be Other to whiteness, Europeaness, and so forth (Roy 2004, 124–126; Tibi 2010, 134). A similar juxtaposition of Finnish culture and Islam was demonstrated in a study by Magdalena Jaakkola (2009, 62), in which 24 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that ‘the practice of Islam should not be allowed in Finland because it threatens our culture’.¹⁹

Other social identities of importance here are national and ethnic identities, the boundaries of which are likewise fuzzy. In fact, Anthony D. Smith (1991, 12–13) argues that every idea of a nation has an ethnic component that rests on a presumed common descent, common language, and shared customs and traditions between those regarded as co-nationals. Besides this, however, national communities are built on the ‘civic’ foundation of national territory and institutions. What is of particular importance here is that, if understood in the civic sense, nationality can be changed by moving to a new country and acquiring its citizenship. In light of the emphasis on common ancestry, the ethnic component, in contrast, is typically thought of as immutable (Smith 1991, 9–11). As discussed in the following sections (and in Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2013), the data used in this thesis contain several different conceptions of Finnishness,

¹⁹ ‘Suomessa ei tulisi sallia islamin uskonnon harjoittamista, koska se uhkaa kulttuuriamme’.

some of which are more ethnic and others more civic in character. Accordingly, the different conceptions make different levels of inclusion possible for young Muslims.

Besides studying the salience of social identities and the meanings attributed to them, social psychologists have also been interested in the interplay between various identities.

Intersectionality and hybridity are two of the key terms used to conceptualise this.

The term 'intersectionality' originates in gender studies, where it was first coined by Kimberlé W. Crenshaw (1991, 1989) to make sense of so-called discrimination on multiple grounds. Applied to the study of identities, the term is used to refer to the 'mutually constitutive relations among social identities' (Shields 2008, 301). Social identities are 'mutually constitutive' in the sense that the experience of one social identity may change depending on other identities. Instead of having some kind of uniform Muslim identity, a school-aged Finnish boy with a Somalian background and an elderly Egyptian housewife may experience their own Muslimness quite differently. Gender, nationality, class, religion, age, and all the other identity categories intersect and new, unique forms of identities emerge in their intersections (Pauha 2011, 158–159; see also Härkönen 2016, 14–20; Karlsson Minganti 2008, 3).

The intersectionality principle is particularly important when studying Muslims because of the 'religious reductionism' that they encounter (cf. Esposito 1998, 348). In popular media in particular, but sometimes also in research, there is a tendency to explain the behaviour of Muslim communities and individuals first and foremost in terms of their Islamic dogma. Or, as Nadia Jeldtoft (2013, 85) has commented: 'Clearly, Muslims are not Muslims all the time – but the vast scholarly and public focus on the hypervisible forms of Islam and Muslims leaves the impression that Muslims are “all about Islam”' (see also Otterbeck 2011, 1170).

The intersectionality paradigm provides a healthy reminder that Muslims cannot be reduced to their religion. Despite not using the term 'intersectionality', the Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen (2007, 45–46) gives a similar reminder in his book *Identity and Violence*: 'The fact that a person is a woman does not conflict with her being a vegetarian, which does not militate

against her being a lawyer, which does not prevent her from being a lover of jazz, or a heterosexual, or a supporter of gay and lesbian rights’.

Intersectionality thus refers to the ways in which different identity categories interact and influence each other. Hybridity, in contrast, is about multiplicity within a single identity category, such as ethnicity. A social identity may be hybrid in the sense that it incorporates elements from diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, or other traditions (see, for example, Verkuyten 2005, 151–152). For Verkuyten (2005, 152), a key metaphor and a prime example of hybridity is the creolisation of languages. Similarly to a creole borrowing words and other linguistic features from several languages, a hybrid identity challenges existing boundaries and combines elements across them. In the field of religion, ‘syncretism’ is a near synonym for hybridity.

For me, intersectionality and hybridity are not so much analytical tools, but a general stance towards identity issues. They have served as guiding principles for my research approach, and were essential when I started formulating my research topic. Intersectionality and hybridity directed my focus towards the convergence of categories that are often treated as distinct, and guided me to look for ‘youthful Islamic Finnishness’ (cf. MacKinnon 2013, 1020 & 1023).

3.3.3 Dynamics of religious identity among young Muslims in Europe

David Voas and Fenella Fleischmann (2012) have provided a review of research pertaining to the religious change that Muslim migrants in the West have undergone. According to the authors, the general finding of ethnographic studies is that part of the second generation are rejecting some of their parental traditions in the search for ‘real Islam’. Real Islam, in the view of these young people, is ‘cultureless’, that is, without any ethnic characteristics. Similar reformulations of Islamic tradition can be observed on both sides of the Atlantic, but for somewhat different reasons. In the United States, Muslim communities are more diverse ethnically, and a ‘cultureless Islam’ duly fosters community building. In Europe, Muslim communities tend to be more homogeneous ethnically, and opposition to parental traditions ‘is more often a reaction to generational conflicts, to the low status of the working-class first generation in the receiving society, and to social exclusion and discrimination’ (Voas & Fleischmann 2012, 534–535).

Several studies consequently suggest that the religious identity of young European Muslims is becoming decoupled from their ethnic identity.²⁰ At the same time, it is often suggested that the former has become their most salient identity (see, for example, Ali 2011, 328; Field 2011, 161–162; Hamid 2011, 248; Jacobson 1997, 239; Kashyap & Lewis 2013, 2120–2121). The alleged tendency of European Muslims to identify as Muslims first mirrors the prevailing European trend of discussing Muslim minority communities in religious instead of ethnic terms. In short, the people who used to be referred to as ‘Somali’ or ‘Pakistani’ are nowadays more often referred to as ‘Muslims’ (Connor 2014, 21–22; Pauha 2012, 1).

Young people often frame their religious identity in terms of a generational gap. Garbi Schmidt (2004, 37) summarises the self-understanding of her Danish, Swedish, and North American informants as follows: ‘Although most of my informants stated that Islam was a part of their upbringing and an integrated part of family life, they just as frequently stated that the Islam that they pursue is a-cultural, pure and progressive; Islam as it truly was and is supposed to be. Parents, on the other hand, were described as practicing an Islam infected by cultural misconceptions and thus stagnated, archaic and “dead”’. Schmidt (2004, 38) interprets the emphasis on being different from one’s parents as, in part, strategic. First, by distancing themselves from parental values, Muslim youth may claim space for their own goals and aspirations. Second, emphasising difference may provide some defence against common critiques of Islam. By attributing the violations of democracy, human rights, gender equality, and reason to their parents’ religion, young Muslims can represent their own religiosity as compatible with so-called Western values (Schmidt 2004, 38; see also DeHanas 2013; Jacobson 1997, 241; Karlsson Minganti 2016; Karlsson Minganti 2008, 10; Ryan 2014, 452–453).

Besides parents, traditional religious leaders are also having their authority challenged. Of the young Muslims surveyed in Britain, only 37 per cent felt that they were represented by religious

²⁰ Sean McLoughlin (2010, 575) has suggested that ‘the separation of religious “universals” from cultural “particulars”’ is typical of the offspring of migrants across religious traditions. McLoughlin links this to cosmopolitan encounters among co-religionists; meeting people of the same religion but different ethnicity may quite naturally lead to an increased awareness and reflection of one’s religious identity.

leaders (Field 2011, 164). Instead of traditional *‘ulama* (religious scholars), young people are increasingly seeking religious knowledge from Internet sources and youthful preachers with more ‘street cred’ than official religious credentials (Juntunen 2008, 47; see also Neumann 2016, 126–127).

The religious change and the challenge to traditional authorities are typically not framed as ‘modernising’ the faith. On the contrary, they are understood as a return to one’s roots. In this discourse, the ‘true’ Islam is something that is eternal and immutable, whereas culture is temporary and changing. The ‘true’ Islam is the same as it was in the Prophet’s time, but Muslims have confused it with cultural baggage. What is needed is thus not modernisation but purification (cf. Jacobson 1998, 243).

Interestingly, the few available survey studies paint a picture that is somewhat different from that of ethnographic studies. As noted in Section 3.2.1, surveys show that the religious identities of young European Muslims have not become decoupled from their ethnic identities. On the contrary, the association between religious and ethnic identities appears to be stronger among the second generation than among either the first generation or co-ethnics who have not migrated (Güngör et al. 2013; Voas & Fleischmann 2012, 535). The majority of young Muslims surveyed in Britain perceived their understanding of Islam as similar to that of their parents. If anything, parents were merely seen as stricter with regard to religious observance (Field 2011, 162).

David Voas and Fenella Fleischmann (2012, 535) suggest that the average level of religiosity has remained the same between the generations, but the second generation is more varied with regard to religious identity. Indeed, the rejection of ethnically specific expressions of Islam is only one way in which young Muslims relate to their religious heritage. Other ways may involve selecting only the most personally appealing aspects of Islam or even rejecting the faith completely (Ali 2011, 335; Voas & Fleischmann 2012, 535).

The different results of survey and ethnographic studies could perhaps be explained by differences in data collection. Ethnographic studies have often concentrated on the religiously

active, whereas survey studies may reach a more representative sample of Muslims (cf. Otterbeck 2011, 1170). Furthermore, it might be the case that even if ethnic identities are still strong and tied to religious identities, religion has replaced ethnicity in political discourse. In short, it may be that political action is increasingly undertaken in religious terms, regardless of the identities of individual Muslims. It may be that religious discourse is politically effective in the context of today's Europe.

Joyce Marie Mushaben (2008, 513–514) suggests that the '(re)discovery of religious roots' among Muslim youth can be likened to the American ethnic-identity movements of the 1960s and 1970s in that both are examples of oppressed minorities claiming a positive identity out of the very terms that are used to deprive them of full participation in society. In religious communities, young Muslims find friends, acceptance, and agency that they do not get at school (Mushaben 2008, 515). In a somewhat similar vein, Pia Karlsson Minganti (2008, 12) notes that '[w]hen enrolling in Muslim youth associations, influenced by the Islamic revival, the young women were offered consolation by the notion of Islam as a religion that counteracts racism'.

Field (2011, 164) and Cesari (2013) have both provided summaries of survey results that pertain to national identities of European Muslims. In all the surveys reported by Field (2011, 164), the majority of young respondents felt British, regarded themselves as belonging to Britain, and were attached to the country. At the same time, however, 40–50 per cent of young people saw themselves as Muslim first and British second, while the national identity was primary for less than one in ten respondents. Furthermore, one-quarter of student respondents experienced a conflict between being loyal to the *umma* and to Britain, while 15 per cent considered it impossible to be both Muslim and British (Field 2011, 164). According to Field (2011, 170–171), young British Muslims can be roughly divided into three subgroups: An estimated 50–80 per cent are 'moderate' and 'mainstream'. This group maintains a distinctive Muslim identity, but they are also generally happy with their position in society. The other two groups, in contrast, are more alienated from British society. Approximately 5–10 per cent of young British Muslims are alienated to the extent of completely disidentifying with Britishness and wishing for the downfall of Western society. The remaining one-fifth to one-third are also disillusioned by the position of Muslims in society, but not to such an extreme. Nevertheless, they have only a limited sense of

British patriotism, feel angry about the injustices against Muslims, and experience a conflict between being Muslim and being British (Field 2011, 170–171).

Narrow representations of national belonging are one factor that may hinder the development of national identity among minorities such as Muslims (cf. Jacobson 1997, 248). Social identities emerge as a result of identity negotiations that involve the whole social context. When a person claims a certain identity, others may either confirm or refute the identification (cf. Sakaranaho 2006, 1). The Rejection-Disidentification Model (RDIM) by Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti, Karmela Liebkind, and Erling Solheim (2009, 109), for example, suggests that ‘perceived discrimination prevents minority members from developing a sense of belonging to a superordinate national in-group’.

It is important to note that minority members are not passively at the mercy of identifications imposed on them, but they may challenge exclusionary discourses. Sirkku Varjonen et al. (2017, 9–11) have observed that Estonian- and Russian-speaking immigrants to Finland tend to portray conformity to the mainstream as a duty of the immigrant, whereas Somali-speaking immigrants actively challenge the norm of conformity. The discourse of nonconformity may be strategically preferable for Somalis, who often differ from the mainstream in terms of both appearance and religion (Varjonen et al. 2017, 9–11).

3.4 Social constructionist framework

3.4.1 Key principles of social constructionism

Jacob A. Belzen (2010, 73–77) has made a distinction between two methodological mainstreams in psychology: the empirical-analytical and the hermeneutical orientation (roughly corresponding to quantitative and qualitative research, respectively). According to Belzen (2010, 77), the choice of orientation is dictated by the kind of knowledge sought. The present thesis

aims at *'how or what* questions, as distinguished from *why* questions'²¹ and is therefore hermeneutic in orientation. Instead of predictions and generalisable explanations, I strive for an understanding of the meanings that my informants attach to their identity categories (cf. Belzen 2010, 76–78). When they talk about 'Finnishness' or 'Muslimness', what do they mean? With regard to these kinds of questions, approaches other than the Social Identity Theory discussed in Section 3.3.1 may be more fruitful. Social constructionist approaches – such as discourse and rhetorical psychology – are particularly well placed to address questions of meaning and representation.

As Ian Hacking (2009, 13–14) has noted, 'social construction' is a term that has been applied to issues as diverse as emotions, forests, quarks, nationalism, and the 1980s. Quite often the term is invoked, with little elaboration, as an approximate antonym of 'inevitable', or even of 'real'. Something is said to be socially constructed when it is not determined by the natural order of things but could be otherwise (Hacking 2009, 20 & 144). This kind of conceptual vagueness characterises much of the usage of the term in the study of religions: according to Steven Engler (2004, 301–302 & 305–306), religion scholars often use 'social construction' as a simple shorthand for cultural and historical contingency without explicating an actual process of construction.

In this thesis, I adhere to a more specific usage and subscribe to the social psychological tradition of social constructionism. According to Vivien Burr (2003, 2), social constructionism is a term used almost exclusively in psychology, although many of its principal ideas are also shared by other social scientists. The idea that human reality is produced in communication between people is taken as self-evident, for example, in current thinking on linguistics and anthropology for the most part (Belzen 1995, 49). However, social constructionism also has other key principles that can best be understood as an antithesis to mainstream psychology and social psychology. In contrast to mainstream psychology (and mainstream sociology), social constructionism is decidedly antiessentialist and antirealist, denying both any essential human

²¹ Italics in the original.

nature and the view of knowledge as an objective account of reality (Burr 2003, 3–9; Craib 1997, 14; van der Lans 2002, 25–26).

Most of the other key features of social constructionism stem from antiessentialist ontology and antirealist epistemology. While denying the possibility of objective and impartial truth, social constructionists have emphasised the cultural and historical specificity of knowledge. Anti-essentialism, in turn, has encouraged a shift of focus from the intrapsychic to the interpersonal. In social constructionist thought, such psychological phenomena as attitudes, motivations, and beliefs are not sought inside the person's mind, but from interpersonal interaction. This also has consequences for the conception of language: Traditionally, psychologists have regarded language and thought as separate, with the former being a transparent vehicle of the latter. Social constructionists, in contrast, consider language to be the foundation of thought, as thought operates using linguistic categories and concepts (Burr 2003, 7–9).

The emphasis in social constructionism is thus on processes instead of structures. For this reason, I feel somewhat uneasy with the root metaphor employed, namely that of construction. As Ian Hacking (2009, 61–64) has pointed out, the word 'construction' refers both to a process and its outcome, a structure. The difference is crucial. Practically every school of modern psychology considers the human mind to be, at least to some extent, an outcome of social interactions. In both psychoanalytic and cognitive theories, for example, social relationships are seen as central to the development of psychological structures. What sets social constructionism apart, however, is that the very existence of intrapsychic structures is either denied or deemed irrelevant.

Social constructionist approaches have become well established in general social psychology, but they have been little utilised to date in the social psychology of religion (cf. van der Lans 2002, 26).²² There are some notable exceptions, however: Sue Widdicombe (2011) has analysed

²² Jan M. van der Lans (2002, 28–31) has provided a (now somewhat outdated) review of psychological studies that investigate religion from a social constructionist perspective. Psychologists of religion have conceptualised, for

strategies that Syrian Christians and Muslims use to claim, redefine, or deny religiousness. Widdicombe notes that the different meanings ascribed to being religious served different functions. Nick Hopkins (2011b), in turn, has argued for understanding religious identities as constructed through arguments, and demonstrated his position with interviews with Muslim activists. Chris McVittie, Andy McKinley, and Rahul Sambaraju (2011) have also focused on Muslim religious identities, analysing media interviews with Hamas leaders. All three aforementioned studies can be classified as representing discursive psychology.

Social constructionist social psychology therefore rejects the notion of objective truth as well as explanations in terms of mental processes and stable psychological structures. In contrast to the traditional view of attitudes and beliefs as intrapsychic entities, social constructionists have redefined these and other core psychological concepts as interpersonal processes. This emphasis on language and interaction results in a certain understanding of identity, to which I will now turn.

3.4.2 Social constructionist view of identity

Stuart Hall (1992, 275–277) has presented an influential distinction between three broad conceptions of identity. Of these, the first one, ‘the Enlightenment subject’, involves a conception of identity as having an authentic core, some kind of a true self that is immutable and fixed. The second view, that of ‘the sociological subject’, in turn emphasises the interplay between intrapsychic and interpersonal factors in the creation of identity. Social psychologists, such as Charles H. Cooley (1902, 150–153), have long emphasised that self-representations are, by and large, representations internalised from the outside. In this view, one’s personal self is formed in relation to significant others such as parents. Thus, the sociological subject is not self-contained like the Enlightenment subject, but it still entails a distinction between the inside and the outside, or the self and others (Hall 1992, 275–276).

example, religious belief and religious experience as interpersonal processes. The use of religion in discursive identity formation has also been studied, but in the context of clinical psychology and not in relation to Islam.

The third view, that of 'the postmodern subject', calls all such distinctions into question. The postmodern subject has no fixed essence, but is in constant flux. In short, a postmodern subject is a different person in different contexts (Hall 1992, 276–277). This, in turn, challenges any separation between the self and others. If identity is not static, but changes with the situation, what grounds are there for talking of a person apart from his or her surroundings?

The human in most psychological approaches resembles the sociological subject. I, on the other hand, think of a human as more akin to the postmodern subject. I understand identity as constructed in language and social interaction: identity is not so much inside us but between us (Suoninen 2012, 90). Identities and subjectivities are made salient and constantly renegotiated in relation to both other people and social discourses that have a bearing on the situation. In the words of Suvi Ronkainen (1999, 32):

*Our particularity has no origin outside of discourses, and our selfhood has no specific (authentic) core. Nor has the self to do with some stable personality structure, as is described in psychology. Nor could it have, because the construction of a discursive self is characterised by contextuality and situatedness.*²³

My view is that the social discourses on youth, Islam, and Finnishness, among others, provide boundary conditions for the negotiation of identity as a young Muslim in Finland. To put it another way, the social discourses serve as raw materials for identity formation; by adopting – and at times rejecting – the surrounding representations, young Muslims construct an understanding of themselves.

²³ 'Tietynlaisuudellamme ei ole alkuperää diskurssien ulkopuolella, eikä minuudellamme tiettyä (autenttista) ydintä. Eikä minässä ole kyse myöskään jostain vakiintuneesta persoonallisuusrakenteesta, kuten psykologiassa kuvataan. Eikä voisi ollakaan, sillä diskursiivisen minän rakentumista luonnehtii *kontekstuaalisuus* ja *tilanteisuus*.' (Emphasis in the original.)

I want to emphasise, however, that I do not consider Social Identity Theory and social constructionist approaches as conflicting. As Peter Herriott (2007, 29) has pointed out, Social Identity Theory does not prescribe a view of identity as fixed and solid. As the word implies, social constructionist social psychologies address the social construction of identity categories, whereas Social Identity Theory concerns the dynamics of identification with them (cf. Hopkins 2011b, 532). The two traditions cannot be combined in research practice, however, because they entail different epistemological assumptions.

When discussing the social underpinnings of the human mind, psychologists tend to concentrate on relationships between a person and her or his parents, siblings, and peers. However, people form relationships not just with their immediate others, but also with ideas, symbols, and imaginary beings. Books, movies, and stories may provide one with goals, dreams, values, and roles not that different from those provided by parents or other close relations.²⁴

In the field of religion, it is easy to find examples of how people relate to ideas or stories. In his role theory, psychologist of religion Hjalmar Sundén (1959) even considers this to be a key way in which religions operate psychologically.²⁵ According to Sundén, the basis of religious experience lies in taking a religious role ('rolltagande'; see, for example, Sundén 1959, 51–53). When a person is socialised into a religious tradition, they will be able to utilise it to make sense of their life by adopting roles that are embedded in this tradition. This provides an alternative

²⁴ Social psychologist János László (2014) has discussed extensively the ways in which historical narratives in newspapers, novels, textbooks, and so forth are used in the construction of national identities. Eerika Finell (2012), in turn, has analysed the meanings attributed to Finnish national symbols, such as nature, sauna, and the Winter War. Besides meanings, Finell (2012) also studied how in- and out-group attitudes relate to the strength of identification with the symbols.

²⁵ Even though Sundén's work predates the advent of social constructionism, Jacob A. Belzen (1995, 48) and Jan M. van der Lans (2002, 29) consider him a social constructionist. The claim is debatable, however, because Sundén is hardly consistent in his use of theory and concepts; as Tomas Lindgren (2014, 41) has demonstrated, Sundén borrows liberally from a range of theories, including cognitive and psychodynamic ones. Furthermore, Lindgren (2014, 41) points out that even though Sundén criticises naive realism, he himself uses his data in a naive realist way and reads religious narratives as objective descriptions of religious experiences.

way of interpreting a situation. Role-taking enables a person to switch from a regular frame of reference to one in which they view the situation through the eyes of a religious figure (Belzen 1995, 51–54; Sundén 1959, 52–54). Someone who is socialised into the Christian tradition, for example, could compare their difficulties to the tribulations of Job and duly find meaning in them.

Whether or not God exists in any ontological sense, people still form relationships with Him. People talk to God and interpret life events as responses from Him. People try to abide by God's will – or, sometimes, to rebel against Him. For them, God is a very real and present communication partner, even if He is not physically seen.

4 Young Finnish Muslims constructing their identities

4.1 Outlining the thesis project

The research questions for this study are as follows:

- *How do young Finnish Muslims negotiate belonging in various religious, national, ethnic, and other identity categories?*
- *What kinds of meanings are associated with these categories?*

In order to approach these questions from several different angles, the overall thesis project is comprised of three sub-studies:

- *Study 1: “Don’t Ever Convert to a Finn”: Young Muslims writing about Finnishness’ (Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2013)*
- *Study 2: ‘Ambassadors of Faith: Young Muslims Negotiating for Agency in the Face of Discursive Government’ (Pauha 2015)*
- *Study 3: ‘Praying for One Umma: Rhetorical Construction of a Global Islamic Community in the Facebook Prayers of Young Finnish Muslims’ (Pauha 2017)*

I started my thesis with data I had gathered during a previous project (Pauha 2010) but with few preconceptions of what I would find. Therefore, I opted for an inductive analysis method that would allow me to identify patterns in the data without having strong theoretical commitments beforehand. Grounded Theory fitted the requirements well. As a result of being more interested in ‘how’ and ‘what’ than ‘why’ questions, I chose social constructionist Grounded Theory as my approach (cf. Charmaz 2008, 398).

Sub-study 1 confirmed my trust in the usefulness of the social constructionist approach to identity and I decided to adopt methods more traditional of social constructionist social psychology. In sub-study 2, I wanted to understand the positionings available to young Muslim

activists. Foucauldian discourse analysis was my preferred method because of its many tools for understanding how positionings are shaped through discourse. Sub-study 3, in turn, focused on the argumentative aspects of religious communication. Rhetorical psychology emphasises the argumentative character of human psychic functioning, and was therefore a natural choice for the analytical approach.

Despite this variety of approaches, the sub-studies are bound together by a common view of the human mind. I subscribe to the view that the human mind is socially and culturally constituted to a degree that challenges the everyday distinction between intrapsychic and interpersonal. Indeed, much of what is considered to be intrapsychic is in fact better understood as interpersonal. In line with social constructionist thinking, I do not regard selves, identities, subjectivities, and so on as entities internal to people, but rather as processes that occur between them (see, for example, van der Lans 2002, 24). With regard to the distinction between substantialist and relational ontologies (see, for example, Nelson 2009, 173), my approach is thus situated towards the relational end of the spectrum.²⁶

When studying Muslims, the multiplicity of Islam poses noteworthy challenges to the selection of informants. Islam is not a singular entity, and there is an impressive array of individuals and communities that refer to themselves as Muslim. At times, two groups of Muslims have mutually contradictory beliefs and practices, and at times, one group does not acknowledge the Muslimness of another. The question ‘who is a Muslim?’ is, therefore, a topical and important one characterised by controversy and complexity.²⁷

Gabriele Marranci (2008) has argued that ‘who is a Muslim?’ is a question that cannot be answered by referring to common cultural elements, but by referring to feelings and emotions. According to Marranci (2008), ‘I’m Muslim’ quite simply means ‘I feel Muslim’. In a similar vein, I have used self-identification as the criterion of inclusion in the data. In each of the sub-studies,

²⁶ Ontologically, I do not deny the existence of intrapsychic states but consider them to be both beyond the reach of the methods employed and irrelevant for the purposes of this study (cf. Pauha 2015, 84 & 93).

²⁷ The issue of defining Islam will be discussed in depth in Section 5.2.

the informants have in some way labelled themselves as Muslims. This was done either by choosing a questionnaire item (sub-study 1), by responding to an announcement that called for Muslim interviewees (sub-study 2), or by maintaining a Facebook group designated as Muslim (sub-study 3).

This criterion of inclusion was challenged by some of my informants, who felt that self-identification as a Muslim is not enough, but rather that true Muslimness requires adherence to a certain set of norms. Some interviewees in sub-study 2 even questioned themselves by stating that they would probably not be accepted as Muslims by certain Muslim communities (cf. Pauha 2015, 88).

4.2 Validity concerns

Jacob A. Belzen (2010, 79) has proposed three kinds of validity that are relevant for assessing qualitative research. Firstly, a study gains ecological validation from being close to the life context of the informants. Secondly, communicative validation stems from checking interpretations with the informants or others who are familiar with their life context. Thirdly, cumulative validation is about comparing the proposed results with those of other studies carried out by different researchers or employing different methods (Belzen 2010, 79).

Measures to ensure ecological and cumulative validation have been integrated into the study design from the beginning. In order to obtain ecologically valid data, I have employed naturally occurring data (sub-study 3) or open-ended assignments (sub-studies 1 and 2) that allow the informants to freely discuss the issues that they themselves consider to be the most important. Cumulative validation, in turn, was sought by checking all interpretations against existing research literature. Furthermore, following the principle of triangulation (cf. Belzen 2010, 7; Cooligan 2006, 95), the three sub-studies utilised different methods and data sources, and were then contrasted with each other.

As mentioned in Section 1, there is much discussion surrounding young Muslims, but young Muslims themselves are seldom heard. Furthermore, journalistic accounts in particular tend to be rather sensationalistic, portraying young Muslims in a simplistic way. To avoid these pitfalls, I have paid special attention to communicative validation. During the interviews, I adopted the habit of rephrasing the response back to the interviewee in order to confirm my understanding. Furthermore, before publication, I shared the manuscripts with the interviewees to give them the chance to comment on my interpretations of their responses.

In contrast to validity, reliability is a concept of limited use with regard to qualitative research, and there are not really any techniques for assessing it. In qualitative research, data and results are never independent of the researcher and the unique situation in which the data were collected. Therefore, in a different situation or when obtained by another researcher, the results will by necessity be different (Belzen 2010, 79–80; Cooligan 2006, 94). In place of reliability, Belzen (2010, 80) calls for transparency. In order to make my interpretations transparent, I have complemented them with abundant excerpts from the data.

A further measure of quality in qualitative research is saturation (see, for example, Cooligan 2006, 95; Saunders et al. 2017). Saturation can be seen as the point in the research process after which further data collection and analysis become counterproductive and add relatively little to the research findings. It is, of course, difficult to know for certain whether saturation has been reached because there is always at least a theoretical possibility of something new emerging (Saunders et al. 2017, 1900–1901). However, towards the end of the research process, I experienced ‘the diminishing returns’ discussed by Mason (2010). When analysing new data, I kept encountering the same themes as before, and novel findings became ever more infrequent. More importantly, new findings were in line with the previous ones, corroborating and elaborating on them. Therefore, I am fairly confident that an adequate level of saturation has been reached, and additional research material would not have refuted my results.

4.3 Primary results of the sub-studies

In the article “‘Don’t Ever Convert to a Finn’: Young Muslims writing about Finnishness’, together with Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti, I analyse letters that 11- to 16-year-old Muslims have written to an imaginary friend about living in Finland as a young Muslim. For the most part, the letters describe the country in positive terms, as a safe and prosperous society in which Muslims are free to practise their faith. The Finnish culture and people, in turn, are portrayed in a more ambiguous light. On the one hand, Finns are characterised as friendly and respectful but, on the other, they sometimes appear as racist in the letters and, in any case, as an Other to Muslims. We hypothesise that the sense of Otherness may be due to ‘civil Lutheranism’ embedded in the Finnish national culture. Many of the Finnish national traditions are Lutheran in origin, which may lead young Muslims to associate Finnishness with Christianity (Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2013).

For the article ‘Ambassadors of Faith: Young Muslims Negotiating for Agency in the Face of Discursive Government’, I interviewed 14 young Muslims active in civil society organisations. With the help of discourse analysis, I aimed to understand the ways in which they position themselves in relation to the various discourses that govern the standards of good Muslimness. My young interviewees appeared to be rather skillful at using the discourses to claim agency in both the Muslim community and the broader society. By emphasising the difference between young Muslims and their parental generation, the interviewees can justify the need for Islamic youth organisations separate from the mosque associations of the older generation (Pauha 2015).

In my third article, ‘Praying for One Umma: Rhetorical Construction of a Global Islamic Community in the Facebook Prayers of Young Finnish Muslims’, I employ the tools of rhetorical psychology to analyse online prayers. On the basis of my analysis, I argue that the prayers serve a function similar to the ‘flagging’ of national identity. Through selective use of rhetorical devices such as metaphor, the prayers portray Muslims worldwide as one unified community that transcends national, ethnic, and even familial boundaries (Pauha 2017).

In many regards, the three sub-studies paint a rather uniform picture of Finnish Muslim identities, but there are also noteworthy contrasts. Next, I will bring the studies into dialogue with each other to clarify and specify their differences and similarities.

4.4 Synthesising the results

4.4.1 The many versions of Finnishness

The letters analysed for sub-study 1 in particular represent Finnishness and Muslimness as two ends of the same continuum; Finnishness is associated with things that are *haram*, especially smoking and drinking,²⁸ and, as a result, becoming more like the Finns is portrayed as a cause of losing one's Muslimness.²⁹ This lay theory of acculturation bears a marked resemblance to the so-called unidirectional models of acculturation (see Section 3.2.1).

The idea of Finnishness and Muslimness as polar opposites is also present in the interview data gathered for sub-study 2. Like the letters of sub-study 1, the interviewees convey representations of Finnishness that are difficult to integrate with their Muslim identity. Especially pronounced are stereotypes that are related to physical appearance. Finnishness is associated with, for example, blue eyes, blonde hair, and light skin.³⁰ Finnishness is understood as an inborn ethnicity, and the boundary between 'Finns' and 'immigrants' is clear.

²⁸ Studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s portrayed alcohol and intoxication as the key for Finnish youth to become part of a group and to gain social status. Since then, however, the situation has become more diverse, and in contrast to a long tradition that has glorified drunkenness, more and more adolescents are holding negative views about intoxication (Lähteenmaa 2007). According to Jaana Lähteenmaa (2007, 97), one reason for the change may be the increasing presence of Muslims in Finland. Young Muslims provide other young people with examples of how to abstain from alcohol without being considered "a wuss". At least in some of the youth cultures of metropolitan Helsinki, the tide has turned to such an extent that drunkenness is seen as backward and stupid (Lähteenmaa 2007).

²⁹ In a somewhat similar vein, the Somali girls interviewed by Heli Niemelä (2006, 171) considered alcohol consumption as a norm to be followed by Finnish youth. The notion of normative alcohol use was discursively used to set Somali girls apart from their Finnish peers.

³⁰ It may be worth noting that the interviewer has all of these characteristics.

However, the very same data in sub-study 2 also contain different conceptions of Finnishness – conceptions that do not rely on skin or hair colour and are therefore more open to ethnic diversity. Finnishness is associated with certain personality characteristics or cultural customs; quietness, peacefulness, directness, and sauna, for example, are traits and traditions that are mentioned in connection to Finnishness. Some of these traits are seen as uniting Finns and Muslims.

When gathering the data, I was struck by how many different and changing meanings were ascribed to identity categories, such as ‘Finnish’. The identity categories appeared to take on new meanings and shed older ones – all in the course of a single interview. Relatedly, the interviewees shifted between identifying with certain identity categories and disidentifying with them. This was particularly true in the case of Finnishness; national identifications appeared to shift and change depending on the meanings associated with being Finnish. One interviewee, for example, said that her parents had raised her with the idea that she ‘has the same rights as the young Finns, that it is allowed to be just like them, that “you are just a young Finn”’³¹. The quote shows an illuminating progression from ‘having the same rights’ to ‘being allowed to be just like them’ and finally to ‘being a young Finn’.

Compared to the first two sub-studies, the Facebook data in sub-study 3 contain noticeably few references to Finnishness. Finns are portrayed neither as Others nor as a reference group. The Facebook prayers disidentify with nationality in general, Finnishness being no exception.

As the three sub-studies demonstrate, to simply argue whether or not young Muslims identify with Finnishness is beside the point. Processes of national identification are much more complex than just a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. As emphasised above in Section 3.4, identities are always constructed in interaction and for interactional purposes.

³¹ ‘[...] on samanlaiset oikeudet ku suomalaisilla nuorilla, et saa olla iha samanlainen ku he, et sä oot iha suomalainen nuori.’

4.4.2 Religion as a floating signifier

In contrast to nationality, religious identity struck me as rather stable. Despite sometimes noting the opposing views of others (see Section 4.1), the interviewees in sub-study 2 never expressed personal doubts about their own Muslimness. Furthermore, when asked what Islam means to them, they tended to give rather general and all-encompassing answers: Islam is part of everything in their lives. One of the interviewees, for example, explicitly stated that she wants to combine aspects of Finnishness and Islam in her identity. She mentioned three things as being particularly valuable about Finnishness: honesty, persistence, and tolerance for difference. In contrast, when asked about Islam and what she values about it, this is how she answered:

In my view, everything in Islam is, like, good and one can take everything from it. So, there is nothing, like... There is nothing, like, bad that could be said. So, it is if... one really understands the Islamic religion and really knows what Islam in reality is... then one only finds all the good things in it.³²

If compared with how the interviewee describes Finnishness, she is notably vague about the content of her religious identity. This is typical of the data in sub-study 2 generally: the interviewees state that religiousness affects every aspect of their lives, but exactly how this is manifested is often left hanging in the air.

The relatively undefined nature of Islam may, at least in part, be related to the way the data for sub-study 2 were collected: It may be that the interviewees needed to justify their Finnishness when conversing with a researcher who is a non-Muslim and an ethnic Finn, whereas Muslimness is something that they could take more for granted. Perhaps they produced more fine-grained analyses of Finnishness than Muslimness because, in the interview context, their

³² 'Mun mielestä islamissa on niinku kaikki hyvää et sieltä voi ottaa kaiken mukaan... Et ei oo mitään semmost... ei oo mitään semmost huonoo mitä vois sanoa. Et se on jos... oikeesti ymmärtää islam-uskonnon ja tietää oikeesti mitä todellisuudessa islam on... nii sieltä löytää vaan kaikki hyvät asiat.'

Finnishness was the more problematic of the two. Similarly, Inkeri Rissanen (2014a, 130) has noted that, in her study of young Muslims in Finland, some of the informants emphasised their Muslim identity in the research interviews but examined it more critically in a group of Muslim peers.

Alternatively, it may be that the interviewees avoided assuming the position of an expert in religious matters. As discussed in Pauha (2015; see also Hopkins, Greenwood & Birchall 2007; Oikarinen-Jabai 2017a, 51–52), the interviewees felt like representatives of their whole faith community for non-Muslim mainstream society. Perhaps vagueness with regard to religion distances them from the liability of being perceived as religious authorities when talking with a non-Muslim researcher. Indeed, Muslim identity is most explicitly characterised in the data gathered from the Facebook group *Suomen Nuorten Muslimit*, the primary audience of which is other young Muslims (see, for example, Pauha 2017, 64).

4.4.3 De-ethnicising Islam

Even though the interview data in sub-study 2 in particular are rather vague in terms of specifying the Muslim identity, there are a number of references to ‘true’ Islam or ‘true’ Muslims. In the interviews, true Islam is typically characterised through negation. For example, several interviewees decidedly distanced themselves from the stereotype of the violent Muslim, and explicitly labelled violent radicals as misguided.³³ The interviewees were also keen to point out that even though Islam is often associated with, for example, the subjugation of women, such practices are cultural or ethnic in origin, and hence not part of Islam proper. As described earlier in Section 3.3.3, denouncing violence, gender inequality and so forth as ‘ethnic’ and not ‘Islamic’ is a strategy used by young European Muslims to construct their religious identities as being compatible with the values of the surrounding society.

³³ Jonas Otterbeck (2015) has described a similar dynamic in which young Muslims discursively construct ‘a respectable Islam’ by demarcating it from ‘extremist’ ideas.

Strict demarcation between religion and ethnic habits is thus characteristic of the interviews in sub-study 2, while a community of believers that transcends ethnic and national boundaries comes across as being an ideal nurtured by the young Muslims. The universal character of the Islamic religion and solidarity among Muslims throughout the world are even more strongly emphasised in the Facebook posts that were analysed for sub-study 3.

Besides being transnational, the identities constructed in the datasets of sub-studies 2 and 3 are also politicised. They involve a narrative of a global Muslim community that is being victimised by hostile forces, above all the United States and its allies. The narrative of victimhood, in turn, may be used to justify sympathy and solidarity. As such, the transnational Muslim identities may serve as enablers of collective action. Indeed, a study by Marko Juntunen, Karin Creutz-Sundblom and Juha Saarinen (2016, 58) has found that ‘the urge to defend the suffering Muslim “brothers” and “sisters”’ has been the main motivating factor for Finnish Muslims to join the armed groups in Syria and Iraq (see also Thomas 2012, 17).

Transnational solidarity can be used to persuade people to commit terrorist acts or other atrocities. Alternatively, calls for solidarity can also serve as a catalyst for prosocial action; environmental NGOs, development organisations, and so forth all justify their actions by solidarity that crosses the boundaries of nation or even species.

All in all, the Islam advocated by the informants closely resembles the ‘cultureless Islam’ described in Section 3.3.3. The words of Voas and Fleischmann (2012, 538; see also Ryan 2014, 453) are fitting in this context: ‘[W]ith the benefit of education, idealism, and Western individualism, some children of Muslim immigrants look for a “real Islam” that is free from the defects they see in the parental culture. Instead of blaming the religion for troubles in their families’ countries of origin, not to mention their own upbringing, they attribute all ills to local customs. Islam becomes a Teflon religion, to which nothing bad can stick’.

4.4.4 Islam and national Otherness

As described in the previous section, the datasets of sub-studies 2 and 3 tend to portray the ‘true’ Islam as a single, uniform faith that has no ethnic or national divisions. However, this is not the only kind of interplay between religion, ethnicity, and nationality in the data. Firstly, there are some signs of an ethnic hierarchy with regard to religion. The letter data of sub-study 1 in particular refer to Somalis as an epitome of faith. One of the letters, for example, advises a friend as follows: ‘Get to know Somalis as they are true Muslims’ (Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2017, 29).³⁴ Secondly, and more importantly, even though the young Muslims criticise ethnic interpretations of Islam, they also ‘ethnicise’ (cf. Roy 2004, 124–137; Tibi 2010) Islam by portraying it as an Other to being Finnish. One of the interviewees in sub-study 2, for example, states that ‘as young Muslims we should perhaps approach Finns more confidently’.³⁵ In another part of the interview, he divides his goals as a civil society activist into two categories: ‘internal goals’ (that is, those affecting the Muslim community) and ‘external goals’ (those affecting ‘the original population’³⁶). In so doing, he implicitly defines Muslims as his in-group for which ‘the original population’ is an out-group.

In another interview, the interviewee makes an interesting distinction between two kinds of Muslim youth:

In my opinion, there are two kinds of young Muslims [...] there are those that have, like, found their own identity... that are not, like, in between two chasms... thinking that, ‘which is the group to which I belong’, that, ‘am I in this, like, group of Muslim youth or am I in this, like, group of Finnish youth’. And then there are those people that have, like, taken the good parts of both and combined them and made this, like, own unity and found, like, their very own way... that have not, like, gone in the

³⁴ ‘Tutustu somppuihi ku ne on true muslimei.’

³⁵ ‘nuorina muslimeina nii meidän pitäs ehkä vähän rohkeemmin lähestyä suomalaisia’

³⁶ ‘kantaväestö’

direction that 'I am giving up my own culture, identity and religion completely and I am going into this, like, group of young Finns...'.³⁷

According to the interviewee above, it is possible to combine being Muslim with being Finnish. One can adopt elements from both 'groups' and craft them into one's 'very own way'. The groups, however, remain separate. It is also worth noting in the excerpt that 'one's own culture, identity and religion' refer specifically to something that is Other to being Finnish.

Similarly, many of the letters in sub-study 1 represent Muslimness and Finnishness as two different entities. It is possible to belong to both, but they still appear as distinct and clearly defined. One letter, for example, states, 'It is wonderful to belong to two cultures. I can compare the culture of Finland with the culture of Islam'.³⁸ The writer thus describes herself as a member of two cultures. The cultures, however, remain separate and have their own unique characteristics that can be compared with each other.

Not every letter is this positive regarding membership of both cultures, however. As stated before, several letters express concern about losing one's Muslimness in becoming more like the Finns. In some letters, Finnishness almost appears to be some kind of alternative religion to which one can convert. One letter even makes explicit use of the concept of conversion and demands: 'DON'T ever convert to a Finn'.³⁹

The fact that being Finnish is often portrayed as an Other compared to being Muslim appears to involve representations that associate Finnishness with Christianity. As described earlier in

³⁷ 'Mun mielestä musliminuorii on kahdenlaisia [...] on semmosii, jotka niinku on löytäny oman identiteettinsä... että ei niinku oo sillä tavoin niinku kahden kuilun välissä... et miettii että kumpaan ryhmään mä kuulun, et oonko mä täs niinku musliminuorten ryhmässä vai oonko mä täs niinku suomalaisten nuorten ryhmässä. Ja sit on niitä ihmisiä, jotka niinku on ottanu molemmista niinku hyvät puolet ja yhdistäny ja tehny tällasen niinku oman kokonaisuuden ja löytäny ihan niinku oman tien... ettei oo niinku lähteny joko siihen suuntaan, et mä luovun kokonaan mun omasta kulttuurista, identiteetistä ja uskonnosta ja mä lähen tähän niinku suomalaisten nuorten ryhmään...'.
³⁸ 'On mahtavaa kuulua kahteen kulttuuriin. Pystyn vertailemaan Suomen kulttuuria Islamin kulttuuriin.'

³⁹ 'ÄLÄ ikänä käänny suomalaiseksi.'

Section 2.2, such representations are not only characteristic of Finnish Muslims, but of Finnish society more generally. Sociologists of religion, for example, have characterised Finnish Lutheranism using the term ‘civil religion’, originally coined by Robert N. Bellah (1967). Unlike the American civil religion, as described by Bellah, the Finnish civil religion is decidedly confessional, and more specifically Lutheran. Finnish national traditions and symbols, from the Finnish flag to Independence Day celebrations, are tightly interwoven with Lutheran Christianity (cf. Ketola, Pesonen & Sjöblom 1998, 123–126). When the Finnish national identity is ‘flagged’ (cf. Billig 1995; Pauha 2017) with symbols deriving from Christianity, it is no surprise that Finnishness is associated with being Christian.

All in all, the identity categories of Finnishness and Muslimness appear to be somewhat conflicted. Muslim Finnishness, if considered to be Finnishness at all, is presented as something atypical and unconventional. As one of the interviewees said with regard to himself, ‘it is not that easy being a Finn who is a little more different’.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ ‘ei oo niin helppoa olla vähän erilaisempi suomalainen’

5 Concluding remarks

5.1 Summary

As the three sub-studies demonstrate, identities can be elusive. During an interaction, identity categories are given definite and fixed meanings that are negated in the next instant.

Furthermore, the meanings are often implicit and hazy. They are unstated or defined through difference.

Gary S. Gregg (2007, 31–35) and Chris Weedon (2004, 19), for example, have proposed that identity formation adheres to the structuralist logic of making meaning through difference. To paraphrase the key tenet of philosophical structuralism, nothing has a meaning by itself, but meaning arises from a web of relations. For example, “a cat” is defined by distinguishing it from other animals. Similarly, in the study of identity, it is often emphasised that identities are constructed against an Other. A good example of the construction of identity through difference is the slogan of the 19th-century nationalist movement in Finland: ‘Swedes we are no longer; Russians we shall never be; therefore let us be Finns’ (McRae 1997, 32). Accordingly, identity categories in my research interviews appear to be binary in nature: when the interviewees characterise themselves as ‘young’, the spectre of those who are ‘old(er)’ is always near.

This mutual interdependence of different identity categories became very clear during my research process. This applies especially to religious identity, as the informants most often defined their religious identity by denying various kinds of false or ‘misguided’ Islam. In the interviews in particular, religious identity was defined almost only through negation.

Furthermore, the Muslim identity is typically constructed as global and universal. The key idea appears to be that Islam is one, and ethnic or national forms of Islam are vehemently condemned. This de-ethnicisation of the religious identity and formation of a transnational consciousness correspond to the lived reality of the young Muslims. After all, the young Muslims spend their days in multiethnic classrooms and peer groups. They participate in religious education together

with other young Muslims, many of whom do not share their ethnic or cultural background. In this respect, the face of Islam that they see in their everyday lives is much more varied than the one to which their (often) first-generation immigrant parents have been accustomed. The practice of religion together with one's peers of different ethnicity is easier if culture-specific aspects of Islam are mitigated.

At the same time, however, the data contain references to a Finnish form of Islam. The references occur when the discussion is on the different needs of Muslims who have grown up in Finland compared to their immigrant parents. The informants expressed concern about their peers, who are portrayed as being caught between two worlds. However, even when calling for integration of Islam with Finnish customs, the informants were not willing to negotiate what they considered to be the core of their faith. When seeking integration, the informants adapt Finnish customs to comply with Islamic teachings but never the other way around.⁴¹ Furthermore, even when not portrayed as mutually exclusive, Islam and nationality appear to remain separate. They are like two different clubs; one can belong to both the Islam club and the Finnish club, but 'a Finnish Islam club' is not on offer.

5.2 Islam as 'a pool of stories'

The study of Islam entails a certain irony: namely, both the non-Muslim public and many Muslims tend to talk of Islam in the singular, as a more or less monolithic entity with certain essential characteristics (Kolig 2012, 3). In this view, there is a certain immutable core to Islam. This immutable core, in turn, serves as a demarcating criterion for what is 'truly Islamic' and what is not.

For example, after terrorist incidents, the media are often full of debates about whether Islam is fundamentally a religion of peace or a religion of war. For a religion scholar, such debates are

⁴¹ Similarly, Heli Niemelä (2003, 93; 2006, 176) has noted that even though her young Somali interviewees were actively trying to integrate Islam with Finnish traditions, the integration was guided by religion.

beside the point because the mere concept of a 'true' Islam involves a metaphysical belief. If one does not presuppose a kingdom of God, where would such a 'true' Islam reside? Without making such presuppositions, the academic study of religions conceives of Islam as the things that Muslims do religiously (cf. Knight 2016, 24; Neumann 2016, 69).⁴²

The empirical reality is that there is no universal consensus regarding the essential elements and boundaries of Islam. Instead, there are a wide range of communities and individuals, many of whom have differing criteria for considering themselves 'true Muslims'. To elevate some of these criteria above others is to make a theological statement and, as such, is not a task for a religious studies scholar. Hence, many academics refrain from making such statements and prefer to talk of 'Islams' in the plural instead.

In her critique of the so-called World Religions Paradigm (WRP), Malory Nye (2003, 12–13) has written with regard to Christianity:

[W]e need to reconsider the perspective that there is a single Christianity, that encompasses all Christian traditions, across history and across the world. [T]he study of Christianity entails a study of Christians in a particular time and place, for example in twenty-first century America, or medieval Europe. The assumption we often make that the Christian traditions found in such different contexts amount to the 'same thing' (the same 'religion') needs to be reassessed. Instead we should start with the assumption that these different Christianities can only be understood in their own particular terms.

This very same point applies, of course, to Islam, which Nye (2003, 13) also makes clear. Instead of a bounded entity with certain fixed and essential characteristics, Islam is better understood as

⁴² Besides defining Islam and Muslims, a further challenge, and quite possibly a much more difficult one, is defining the term 'religion'. This challenge has stirred up a lot of discussion among religion scholars, and a consensus is yet to be reached. On defining religion, see, for example, Gothóni (2000, 10–22) and Nelson (2009, 3–11).

‘a discursive tradition’ (Asad 2009; see also Anjum 2007) – or, as I call it in one of my articles, ‘a pool of stories’ (Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2013, 187). Islam is not a clearly defined entity, but an umbrella term for many different, and sometimes even conflicting, beliefs and practices (see also Hopkins 2011b, 531).⁴³

Despite seeing Islam as a multiple entity, I consider the ‘myth of the one Islam’ as one of the key discourses in my data. Therefore, understanding *umma* as an imagined community or as a social construction does not render it meaningless. On the contrary, and as the Foucauldian tradition emphasises, power is often rooted in one’s ability to make definitions that are socially influential. Being in a position to define ‘true Islam’ and to portray oneself as its representative is a source of significant authority in the Muslim community. Studying the discursive formation of Islam is thus a means of understanding Muslim religious agency. Accordingly, I do not attempt to provide a fixed definition of ‘true Islam’, but study the ways in which the boundaries of Islam are drawn in a range of datasets.

As demonstrated in Pauha (2015), young Muslims engage in constructing discursive boundaries that provide them with agency in relation to their peers, their parental generation, and society at large. The boundaries are not fixed, however, but may be drawn differently if doing so is in line with one’s agency goals. Islamic studies scholar Sadek Hamid (2011, 249) has made a somewhat similar point, stating that ‘even though some young British Muslims feel part of transnational communities, they do not necessarily have to choose between two distinct cultural worlds but alternate between them creatively by adapting and integrating elements from their paternal culture, language and behaviour to suit their immediate environment’.

⁴³ For an alternative view of Islam as a coherent culture, see Kolig (2012). According to Kolig (2012, 19), the sacred texts of Islam generate certain distinctive patterns of thought and behaviour that are shared across national, ethnic, and regional borders. At the same time, Kolig (2012, 20) warns that, instead of ‘eye-catching strong similarities’ the commonalities are likely to appear as “‘family resemblances” in the Wittgensteinian sense and transformations on features of a common thematic origin’.

5.3 Contribution and limitations

Many of the early giants of psychology, such as Freud, Jung, James, and Erikson, were very interested in religion and examined it in their writings. Since then, the interest has waned, and religion has become a rather marginal topic in the overall spectrum of psychology (Anderson 2015, 173; Widdicombe 2011, 468). Furthermore, the existing body of research in the psychology of religion concentrates, by and large, on Christianity, and to some extent, Buddhism and Hinduism. Islam, in turn, has remained largely absent from psychological works (Abu-Raiya & Pargament 2011; Nelson 2009, vi; Paloutzian & Parks 2005, 16; Saroglou & Cohen 2013, 331).

As Hisham Abu-Raiya and Kenneth I. Pargament (2011, 93) have noted in their review, the psychology of Islam has largely relied on theological speculation, clinical observations, and anthropological approaches. Empirical studies, and especially studies employing qualitative methods, in turn, have been scarce (Abu-Raiya 2013, 681; Abu-Raiya & Pargament 2011, 107 & 109). Abu-Raiya and Pargament (2011, 106) suggest the following with regard to future directions for the psychology of Islam:

Clearly, researchers interested in the empirically based psychology of Islam should be well-versed in the particularities and nuances of Islamic faith and culture. We advocate a 'bottom-up' approach of inquiry; research among Muslims should be grounded in Muslims' experiential lives, worldviews, and methods of communication. Using qualitative research methods might be an important first step in this direction as this format of investigation allows Muslim participants to voice their concerns and religious feelings and thoughts in their own ways and in their own words[.]

With this thesis, I heed the call of Abu-Raiya and Pargament (2011, 106) and complement the body of research with a qualitative, bottom-up inquiry into the lives of Finnish Muslim youth. I have striven to give young Muslims themselves a voice, gathering data in an open-ended manner and without forcing their responses into a pre-given set of categories. As noted in Section 4.2, this

was done to ensure the validity of the study, but also to counter the tendency to discuss young Muslims without their own involvement.

What further distinguishes this study from related studies is the emphasis on triangulation. This thesis employs several different methods and several different kinds of data. Especially noteworthy are the Facebook data used in sub-study 3. The Internet and social media play an ever-increasing role in the lives of European Muslim youth. As mentioned in Section 2.1, the Internet is replacing traditional religious authorities and becoming the most important source of religious knowledge for many young Muslims. Despite this, Internet data has been little used in studying them. Internet data has also been largely absent from psychological studies, with social psychology being no exception.

This thesis supports the previous findings that young European Muslims are increasingly identifying with the imagined global Muslim *umma* and rejecting the religious traditions that they regard as ‘ethnic’ or ‘cultural’. Finnish national identity is not explicitly rejected, but it is implicitly portrayed as an Other to Islam. By investigating the meanings that are associated with Finnishness, this study can contribute to the understanding of not just young Muslim identities, but Finnish society more generally. As a state, the Republic of Finland does not profess any religion, even though it grants the Lutheran and Orthodox Churches a special legislative status (Sorsa 2015, 6–10). Despite official neutrality in matters of religion, Finnishness and Lutheranism seem to be tightly interwoven in the public consciousness. As sociologists of religion have demonstrated, Lutheran rituals and traditions are used in the legitimization (and even sacralisation) of the sovereignty of the Finnish nation (Ketola, Pesonen & Sjöblom 1998, 123–126). The findings of this study demonstrate that representations which equate Finnishness with Christianity are also shared by religious minorities; time and again, the participants referred to Finns as Christians and to Finland as ‘a land of the Christians’ (Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti 2013, 128).

By making a sharp distinction between Islam and Finnishness, the informants echo the widespread discourse of Islam as a foreign religion that is alien to Finland and Finnish culture. Both opinion surveys and media studies have documented the significant influence that this

Othering discourse enjoys in Finnish society. Islam is associated with global terrorism and violence, and represented as archaic, strange, and threatening (see, for example, Jaakkola 2009; Raittila & Maasilta 2008, 238). However, as I hope to have demonstrated here, the juxtaposition between Islam and Finnishness is not exclusive to the non-Muslim general public. This thesis complements previous studies by demonstrating that, instead of claiming an identity as 'Finnish Muslims', many young Muslims participate in and thus reinforce the discourse that portrays them as alien to Finnish society.

As noted in Section 4.4, the interview responses in sub-study 2 were formulated as a reaction to an interviewer that was non-Muslim and an ethnic Finn. A Muslim interviewer with an ethnic minority status would certainly have received different responses. The same is likely to apply to the letter data in sub-study 1; even though the letters were addressed to 'an imaginary Muslim friend', the informants were well aware that they would be read by me. It is likely that this awareness affected their responses.

The data in sub-study 3, in contrast, were naturally occurring and therefore unaffected by the researcher's persona. Furthermore, such an effect is problematic only with regard to the so-called classical test theory (see, for example, Konttinen 1980, 25). When applied to identity research, classical test theory would assume that each person has a 'true' identity to be detected by psychological methods. As a result, the interviewer effect would, in this perspective, be considered a source of measurement error. However, as explained in Section 3.4, I do not consider identity as an intrapsychic structure, but as an interpersonal process. Identities originate in interaction with others and are always co-constructed with (both real and imagined) interaction partners. My informants would almost certainly construct themselves differently with a different researcher, but in the perspective adopted here, all of the different identities are equally valid.

It is important to note that all of my datasets are cross-sectional, and therefore do not lend themselves to answering questions about identity development across the life course. Even though I do not consider identity to be a stable and fixed psychological structure, it is clear that it

is constructed differently at different life stages, as the young and the old(er) negotiate their identities in rather differing contexts (cf. Ryan 2014, 458).

5.4 Future directions

According to Jessica Jacobson (1997, 238), '[s]cholars of ethnicity have often treated religious allegiance as one component of ethnic identity'. The present study strongly contradicts such a simplistic conception of the relationship between ethnicity and religion. Even though it is obvious that the two coincide at times, it is equally obvious that at other times they do not. A fine-grained analysis of meanings associated with both ethnicity and religion is necessary for understanding the different ways in which they are related. The Religious Orientations Theory of Allport and Ross (1967), for example, could prove useful in conceptualising the relationship between religious and ethnic identities. As the theory demonstrates, a religious identity can serve several different functions. Persons high in intrinsic religiosity tend to practise religion for its own sake, whereas for the extrinsically religious the reasons tend to be social and particularly related to the attainment or maintenance of status in a social group. Extrinsic religion is, first and foremost, about gaining social goods. Therefore, it may be that the religious identities of the extrinsically religious are closely intertwined with their other social identities, even to the extent of being virtually synonymous with them. Intrinsic religion, in contrast, is an internalised belief system that works autonomously of various social motives. Perhaps, then, the religious identities of the intrinsically religious are relatively unconnected with their other social identities.

As mentioned earlier in Section 4.4.3, the identity constructions in the data resemble the 'cultureless' Muslim identities observed in previous ethnographic studies. However, as mentioned in Section 3.3.3, the few existing survey studies have produced somewhat different results. I suggested that the difference may be due to differences in the data collection; informants in ethnographic research are likely to be religiously active, whereas survey studies may reach a broader range of Muslims. Perhaps 'cultureless' Muslim identities are typical, first and foremost, of those at the higher end of the religiosity scale. This, however, is a hypothesis to be confirmed by future research.

The means of data collection may also, at least partially, explain the results obtained here. For sub-study 2, informants were sought on the basis of their self-identification as Muslims, which may have deterred those with a less pronounced Muslim identity. Indeed, most, if not all, of the informants were religiously active and considered their faith to play a central role in their lives. Accordingly, the results of sub-study 2 cannot be generalised to young Finnish Muslims at large. A similar limitation also applies to sub-study 3 because the profile of the social media platform under study is likely to be particularly inviting to the religiously active.

The data for sub-study 1, in contrast, were gathered in the RE classes of schools in Helsinki, and are more representative of Finnish Muslim youth in general. However, the respondents in this sub-study did not characterise Islam in any detail, which may be due to the wording of the assignment given to them. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the respondents tended to perceive Islam as universal and antithetical to national identities in general, or as antithetical to just the Finnish identity. This is also a question to be considered in future studies.

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